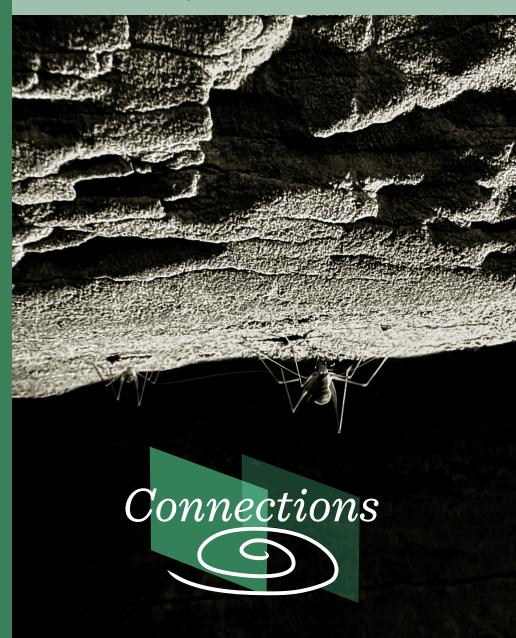
COLLEGE of SOUTHERN MARYLAND



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Mammoth, Donna Sperry



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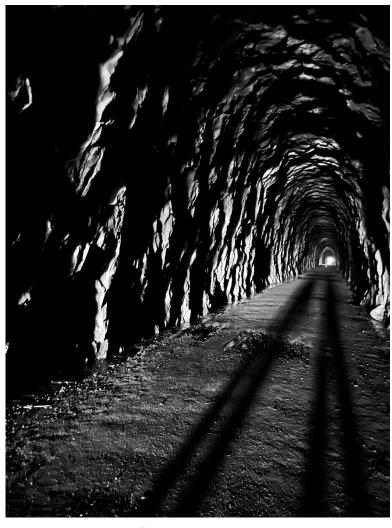
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Ghosts, Donna Sperry

Willow Branch

Lily Ridgell

When I die, look for me in the trees. In the rattling leaves of a quaking aspen, And the hemlock shading the streams. The creak of bark in the wind, Snap of a twig, Crash of a falling trunk.

Notice me in the scent of fresh-blooming dogwood, And pink hues of the eastern redbud. I am a scratching post for a black bear cub, Or a deer's yearly antler rub. Tapped in the fall for sap sickly sweet. Carved initials on an American beech.

I am the new spring twigs that burst from buds, And drupes on which migrating waxwings get drunk. The decaying leaves that settle into detritus, To build a home for the soil that feeds us. I fear becoming only a memory. All the while, I'd like to be irrepressible and free.

So, in a moment of rest, lean upon me.

Hear the whisper of the wind above.

Like a willow, I replenish with just a branch,
Planted in the ones I love.

When I die, don't look for me anywhere,
But in a face you've conjured in the canopies.



Drifting, Heather Christian

Iko

William Miller

A cockatoo on Bourbon Street, he stands behind a barred window all day, all night. A street charmer who doesn't ask for a cigarette, money, anything, he is a local legend. No one knows how old he is, or cares, has held his perch for at least a decade, maybe longer. Once, some frat boys from Mississippi taught him to curse, made parents mad, little tourist kids cry when he hurled invective at them: "Fuck you!" "Fuck you all!" Time mellowed him out, as time will, though he sometimes has mad fits of prophecy, predicts a storm worse than Katrina: "We're all going to die, die, die!" We probably will but not him, a force of nature who persists in dingy white feathers, struggles to be human. He always says hello, bobs his head and asks for nothing but a wave, the hand of recognition. His farewell is plaintive as a lover's cry.



Wandering Streets, Gabriel Rodriguez

HTZ

Quesera Griffin

Midtown Manhattan. 49th & Broadway to be exact. It is mid-October and unseasonably cold.

In my bright fuchsia wool coat, charcoal scarf with matching hat, and contrasting brown cowboy boots (for that eclectic New York image), I am ready for another unpredictable day in the best city on Earth.

Thirty minutes early for work, I stand in front of the bar and "people-watch" ... It's always easy to spot the out-of-towners. They're usually the people who don't quite know how to dress for our chaotic New York weather. Even the overdressed visitors have a hard time dealing with the elements; their faces beaten red by the wind and their lips screaming for Blistex. Mesmerized by the bright lights and flashing bulbs, their heads turn every which way like a kid in a candy store as they play stop and go down the streets, getting in the way of the locals like myself. But today, I am in no particular rush.

Lush exotic flora of every color imaginable is strategically placed behind heavy glass doors to entice passersby who aren't familiar with the main perk of dining here. Once inside, a warm summer breeze engulfs you and sweet hunger-inducing smells of food prepared by master chefs float melodically in the air. Pushing through these doors is an instant relief for some. Not so much for the employees.

As I make my way through the illusion of serenity, I'm as

numb as the faux plants that the real ones have panned out to. Trudging down two flights of drab gray cement staircases, I've instantly forgotten where I am. The upbeat and fast tempo music blaring upon entrance to the restaurant has been swallowed by a mortifying silence that makes me believe that I simply imagined the music in the first place. Narrow and winding halls grow dimmer as they lead to a massive chrome door where a digital password is required for entrance. What secrets does this guardian protect today?

This mystifying door opens to an immense dressing room daubed in peach-colored paint. The door closes behind me. and I'm trapped in limbo. Mirrors surround me and throw images of soulless young ladies all about the room. In the center of it all is a vanity table where us zombies are to find our truths and conceal them. Faces tell tales of hard-luck lives as we chat about anything else and apply layers of makeup to lose ourselves in a fantasy world of being someone else for a few hours. Lockers slam shut and someone in a corner is singing along to the music oozing out of the intercoms overhead. The young lady at the far end of the table is napping before making her long journey home. Her innocent and welldeserved slumber stirs up a playful jealousy. She has finished her shift, thus conquering the enemy: drunken men. Another stands and is making the last few adjustments to her uniform ... which is nothing more than a bikini with a flimsy sarong tied around our waists for the sake of being presumptuous. She showers herself in a fruity body spray, flashes a robotic smile and is all set to carry out her duties as a waitress at Hawaiian Tropic Zone. The rest of us rehearse witty retorts for the new oglers as well as the ogling patrons we've come to tolerate.

While we all tend to share and compare sob stories, our

strongest bond is established through one commonality: we're all broke and a job is a job. This hidden room, protected by that steel guardian is our confession booth at times. A support forum for the emotionally distraught. After all, parading around the chilled restaurant in such little clothing can affect your psyche. Especially when the walls of the building are glass and people on the street are peering in wearing winter clothes. But still, just two flights above our safe haven we have to bounce from table to table mentally absent; flashing cheerful smiles as we are pulled into a trance by the revolving neon awning that tells us why we are so scantily clad.

Tables may be lined with fancy forks, and the wine list may consist of fancy imports, but the real reason people come here isn't for the exquisite menu. Yes, the food is delicious. But so are the sights as stated by a tolerated patron.

As customers sit and enjoy their dining experience, many of us are disgusted with the thought of our occupation. Not necessarily the occupation itself but the "uniform" required to uphold the tropical Hawaiian theme. We joke to pass the time and rush the checks to the last customers. Walking away with tax-free cash each night is how we rationalize our guilt as we make our way back down the narrow winding halls.

Back in front of the restaurant, the same people who darted around with no sense of direction now flutter about like accomplished caterpillars. Passing these people, I flop down the grime embedded concrete stairs to the N train. The pungent stench of urine invades my nostrils worse and worse with each inch of descent. Standing on the platform, that unique smell of destitution explodes in my face as the train pulls into the opposite track. My train can't come yet. I'm meant to endure all of the beauties my city has to offer.

People tiptoeing through golden streams and over murky puddles suffice for a trip to the ballet. Reeking pools of vomit from the partygoers who "can't hang," don't know when to say "when" or were drinking to drown their sorrows team up with every scent in the night to create a most unpleasant aromatic after-party for those who missed the real deal. Too tired to be a party-pooper, my nose is an anxious wall flower. But I expect these things. I've looked forward to them my entire shift. They mean I've conquered the enemy. They mean I'm almost home.



 ${\it Mighty, Susan Strickland}$

I Try

Tru Holland

I try
Why can't you see that
I'm doing my best?
I try
But all you have is complaints
What should I do?
What do you want from me?

I'll look inside again My reserves grow thin I can't keep us both afloat I try

I need help I need some love Why can't you see that? Can't you try?

I do I am But maybe you should work with me And not against you

Before Autumn Goes

Chelsea Whitt

Gazers of gaseous blue
Sunflowers washing bottles and pouring milk
Waiting for the next short-lasting sweetness
A puncheon bridge that forms between
Letting oceans through everything
A mollusk, wet and tope
Opens, glimpsing the honeysuckle tree in our backyard
When we were little pollinators
Sucking the joy out of the pain
I am writing the words over and over,
"Live-long lavender," until it makes sense
I can't be in two places at once
Then and hereafter
The sea arch and the hot air balloon finally leaving this world

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Mother/Daughter - 49/19

Rachel Smith

Ι

Talk of the future is difficult

when the mind goes in too many directions, far off the track that started with 1. get the college application in,

and just like that the conversation turns to whether or not we need toilet paper, or, when we go to Target, let's not forget tampons this time.

II

The moon has eight phases, and the last one is Full,

a cycle, and I remember the viewfinder that taught me this in clicks, how awesome it is, the child, learning.

III

I have always noticed the moon, more now that I'm older, will drive to see it, will sit with it, will tell my daughter she should too because all we really want

is to be that waxing crescent taking on more and more sun.

Bell Curve

 $Zane\ King$

I drew a simple curve. A standard deviation, in on graph[ite].

Mode drew in; trigger pulled. The pep' of flesh, I picture a study, in on graph. A' served.



Abstract Moon, Diane Payne



Night Life, Richard Taylor

puddle jumping

Sherbie Corazza

oh, to be weightless and unafraid unbridled energy swirling into her next form. ancient wisdom falling to meet a broken earth bending to lap the bare feet of the brave.

dissolving sun, again she rises surrendered to the falling or maybe flying. releasing the illusion of control embracing the whole of it. the blessed unknowing colorless courage, the letting of rain.

deconstructing she dances
across darkened skies. undeterred by the labeling
of temporal observers. to them a dog, a dinosaur, an elephant, a fish.
fractured images themselves reflecting
who she might be.

she is fortress and she is dragon.

a field of wild flowers, a delicate feathered thing.

all at once, she is the boat adrift,

the honeyed glimmer of starlight,

the purple depths of the sea.

Art History: Andrea Del Castagno

Heather Bougher

Andrea del Castagno, David with the Head of Goliath, c. 1450/1455, tempera on leather and wood. Florence, Italy.

Now located in Washington, D.C.'s National Gallery of Art (West Building, Main Floor – Gallery 4), Andrea del Castagno's David with the Head of Goliath is a testament to the changing landscapes of mid-fifteenth-century Florence, Italy.

The piece acted as a parade shield meant to be used in civic festivals within Florence rather than a shield witnessing a battlefield's violence. The ceremonial and celebratory format of the piece speaks to its historical significance in art. As one of the significant biblical figures adopted by the Florentine public, David was considered an underdog who defeated tyrants, a kindred spirit for the city with very little of its own defensive characteristics and remained a republic despite many conflicts. Most representations of David to this point were unmoving, steadfast, yet boyish. Castagno depicts David as capable and moving. He's still represented as a wiry youth, but the fluttering hair and drapery contrast with tense musculature and active sling-shot swing. Castagno uses this parade shield to depict physical motion and a story narrative unfolding on a static, flat surface.

Further, Castagno, influenced by Hellenistic Greek sculptors and other Renaissance artists like Lorenzo Ghiberti and Donatello, also considers the viewer's position to the scene's action. David's gaze and movements extend beyond the space of the shield to land on an approaching enemy behind the viewer, the space outside of space. Castagno captures the climactic moment of the battle and the result, with Goliath's head lying at his feet.

Despite the Gothic-looking, craggy landscape, and stylized clouds of past artistic styles, Castagno's interest in physical movement, a rethinking of space, and use of naturalism advanced the Renaissance stylistic characteristics that later influenced artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and other artists well into the Baroque.



David with the Head of Goliath, c. 1450/1455, tempera on leather and wood. Florence, Italy., Andrea del Castagno

Drama, Ice Cream, and Property Damage

James Coleman

Want to know a secret? I feel like I'm alone in this, but I hate Fridays. Seriously, a supposed time for relaxing, hanging out, socializing, and whatever else 16-year-olds do after school. But nope, here I am laying on the floor of my room, not even worthy enough for my bed. But finally breaking up the stillness of my resting place were sudden vibrations in the floor. They were soft and gentle, yet stern, and now they were approaching.

"Dan, honey, I can't watch you sulk around all day like this. Why don't you go outside, maybe hang out with Reggie like you used to? It is a beautiful afternoon."

My face remained firmly planted within the embrace of the floor's carpeting. The best answer I could give my mom was a muffled, "No."

She walked closer and knelt down beside me, rolling me over and brushing my jet-black hair from my face. "Too bad mister. I need you to go and get some groceries anyways so you're leaving the house whether you like it or not!"

Yeah, like I was going to do that. If I was going to get out of this, I needed a lie and fast. "Uh, I got a test tomorrow I need to study for. Big stuff and all tha-" oh shoot wait a minute.

Before I can even think of a save, she was already crossing

her arms, smiling. The silence between us now was her extra victory lap. "Go get dressed, and get out," she finally commanded.

One uneventful 15-minute drive later, I arrived at the local supermarket, where I was sifting through apples trying to find the ones that were most ripe. I dug through the crateful and there was my prize. I reached in but then another pair of hands swooped in to take the sack of apples. The audacity! I turned to face this new adversary only to see an unfortunately familiar face.

I immediately spoke out. "What are you even doing here Laura? Escape out of detention early this time?"

"I could ask you the same question, nerd. Finally crawled out of your hole for something other than school?" She swooped her curly hair back, letting it fall to the side. It was dark like mine and matched her leather jacket and pants. "I'm just here for groceries so relax Dan."

"Whatever, but I found those apples first. So, hand them over."

With a hefty toss she threw them back at me right in the chest. Now smirking, she grabbed an even fresher bag of apples from deeper in the crate and made her exit with a pompous laugh. Laura struck again. It has always been like that between us, even since elementary school. I still swear I didn't cut in line to take the last slice at the end of the year pizza party, she should've been more in the line. But right now, I'm putting that behind me, literally, as I turned and walked down a few aisles and a few more to be safe. I decided to at least grab some type of dessert while I'm here, but some

dude was blocking the shelf. Even crouched down he was apparently tall. His long straight hair matched the color of the strawberry cream puffs box he was grabbing. Unfortunately for me though, that was the last box, and my favorite. The guy rose up to his feet but to my surprise it was another familiar face.

"Reggie? Dude, I haven't seen you all summer! I didn't even recognize you at first. What are you doing here?" I did my best to hide the excitement in my voice.

"Oh, hey man," his deep voice was warm yet oddly detracted. "I guess it has been a while huh? What are you doing here?"

We suddenly drifted apart last school year, and once summer finally rolled around, he basically ghosted me. But I knew I couldn't put the pressure on immediately. "I'm just getting groceries, nothing crazy. Did you want to tag along? Y'know like old times."

Reggie paused for a moment thinking about it harder than I thought he would but finally he gave me a calm, "Yeah," and then we were off.

It was a bit awkward at first as we walked down the beige tiled floors of the cereal aisle; I wondered how we could drift apart like we did. I've known the dude since freshman year of high school. We met during lunch where he forgot his food, so I gave him some of mine and we hit it off from there. Deeper in the aisle I grabbed a box of toaster pastries from the shelf and Reggie immediately chimed in.

"You still eat those at school? Dude that's for breakfast."

"Oh, come on lunch is at 11. That's still morning, and therefore breakfast. I'm not having this argument again."

Then he called me crazy and I said I wouldn't take that from someone who doesn't even remember to bring his food at all. We glared at each other until our serious facades diminished into smiles, and just like that, the memories and good times came rolling back in. There was a constant stream of jokes, and I bet the sound of our laughter probably annoyed the whole store. We even had a cart race down the medicine aisle and the workers actually almost kicked us out. So, we swiftly got the rest of the groceries and ended up in the self-checkout line. Reggie was sifting through the magazines at a nearby shelf but as he did, a newspaper slipped to the side and hit the ground.

As he picked it back up, his gaze lingered on the front-page story. "Yo, Dan check this out."

"Dude, I'm in line."

"My bad," walking over to me, he pointed at the big cover story of the page. It read, Grand Reopening of Local Ice Cream Parlor, Scoops-A-Plenty Open for The New School Year. "Isn't that the place we used to hang out at?"

"Yeah, you're right. And check it out there's a coupon attached as well. Dude we should go!"

We moved up in the line, but just as we were next, Reggie retrieved the strawberry cream puffs box from my basket. So, I had to ask him.

"I thought you hated those. Did I finally win you over?" I

chuckled dryly.

"Ha, you wish. I still think they're disgusting. I don't know how you and my girlfriend love them so much," his laugh was suddenly cut short.

Excuse me, his what now? Not to be melodramatic but I felt almost blindsided. When did this happen? Is this why we drifted apart? In the race of my thoughts the only thing I could say was. "Dude really?"

"Listen Dan, it's been a while. We can catch up at the ice cream parlor after this alright?" And with that, he walked off back deeper into the store.

It was 6:15 and I was on my way to the parlor. Scoops-A-Plenty was one of those evening places that opened up later to try and capitalize on all the kids coming home from school. I remember nearly every day after class we went there to hang out. I miss those days because honestly, he was my only true friend, and the only dude I hung with outside of the social obligations of school.

"Whether or not we get those glory days back hinge on this evening," I said to myself as I pulled into the parking lot. There weren't a lot of cars here surprisingly, but on the bright side, I got a spot close to the door. Promptly, I headed inside and immediately my ears were caught in the familiar crossfire of generic pop music and fluorescent light humming. The place was lined with fresh white and pink striped walls, and all of the tables were in pristine condition despite it being the end of the day. Reggie was already waiting for me inside at one of the booths off to the right of the main counter that centered the store. I sat down across from him.

"It's about time Dan. I already ordered a sundae for myself to not be awkward," he joked dryly.

"Yeah yeah. So about earlier, did you really get a girlfriend? I never thought I'd live to see that." I didn't mean that, but I thought the humor would mask my intentions. But unfortunately, it seems he took that a bit to heart.

"Just listen, remember during sophomore year when I got detention for sleeping in class too much? Well, that was when I met her. I don't know how it happened, but something just clicked."

Just as I was about to hit him with my next question, the jingle of the bells on the door announced their next visitor. Much to my shock and abject horror it ended up being the bane of my existence and she was finishing up the last few bites of a strawberry cream puff as she tossed the wrapper into a nearby trash can. I turned back to Reggie, who felt surprisingly more unnerved than I was. Quickly, I looked down hoping she wouldn't see us, but the click of her boots only grew louder.

"Hey babe, I didn't think you'd be here," she swiftly scooted him over to sit down. "Who's this you're with?" As soon as she sat down, she met my shocked expression with an offended gasp.

Reggie stammered like never before. "What are you doing here Laura?"

"Dude, I got a job here remember? We talked about that," she pulled on her shirt, showing off her new tie dye uniform. "What's his excuse?" she said, gesturing towards me.

I never knew a place with such warm memories could feel so tense like this. The only communication between the three of us was exchanged with brief eye glances and I could tell not a single occupant of the table wanted to be there. It felt like we were all trying to have a telepathic screaming match. Eventually, one of my thoughts finally broke through the barrier of my mind and escaped through my mouth.

"So, you and Laura huh?" Both of their eyes instantly locked on me with unsettling speed.

Reggie placed his palms firmly against the table. His deep voice started off timid but growing sharper as he continued. "I knew this would happen eventually. Dan, this is specifically why we stopped hanging out."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing and I was nearly on the verge of shouting. "So, you left me for some girl, let alone HER?"

"Oh my God, will you chill out? You're always so dramatic! I'm sorry I didn't consider your petty feelings into my love life!"

By this point we were already standing up over our seats. "I didn't know your best friend meant so little to you!" He took a breath and then spoke with a chilling resolve. "Dan, were we ever?"

That was the final straw, I flipped up the ice cream sundae that was on the table, and it splatted right against Reggie's chest. But before I could even see his reaction, he jumped across the table tackling me to the ground. I was pinned down but managed to place my leg under him to kick him off to my

side. We struggled to grapple each other as we were almost stepped on by the other customers as they were fleeing the store. Soon he hoisted me up by the collar and slammed me on the glass of the ice cream counter. His height over me was laughable like David and Goliath. I knew I needed a plan and fast. There was a pile of ice cream waffle cones behind me on the desk that I managed to grab a hold of, and I smashed Reggie over the head with it. Immediately, I was dropped down to the floor as he stumbled backwards, unfortunately he recovered and then punched me with enough force that it launched me backwards against the standing ice cream freezer on the wall. I couldn't tell if the resulting crunch sound was the glass doors or my bones. I collapsed to the ground as the freezer shuddered and wobbled with the impact before it leaned over to begin its descent onto me. But then I was swiftly tackled again, this time by Laura. We both slammed against the main desk, narrowly avoiding the freezer which crashed against the floor with a large industrial boom. Ice cream slowly flowed from its corpse like the blood from my nose. Everything, including all of us, were a mess. Reggie looked down on me seeing red but as he began his approach, he slipped on the ice cream pool and fell backwards. I couldn't help but laugh.

"Alright that's enough! You two are ridiculous!" Laura rose to her feet but almost immediately slipped in the ice cream as well.

I started laughing even harder and when I looked over at Reggie, he started laughing too. It was that stupid contagious laugh that was so common with him, but it worked and now Laura was laughing as well. I considered that maybe we were all just finally going into shock. I looked around and saw my most hated rival and my dearest friend sprawled out on the

floor, absolutely drenched in ice cream. But soon my humor gave way to sorrow.

"This has all gotten so out of hand," I said at last.

"You for real?" Reggie said sarcastically but, I ignored that.

"Listen, I think I am just..."

"Sorry?" Laura interjected. "Me too. I should've realized this whole issue Dan and I got going on would affect you babe."

Reggie slowly managed to get to his knees on the floor. "I thought I could make it work. But it got hard to balance. I'm sorry Dan."

"Nah it's okay man. If I had a girlfriend, I'd probably do the same." I elicited a soft chuckle from the two with that little joke. Which was nice. "I missed you dude, but I don't want to get in the way of you guys."

"Does it really have to be like this though? Why can't you two just get along? Why do you even hate each other?"

"Complex backstory stuff. We'll get into it later," I jested, which Laura smirked at.

"Yeah, but fortunately, I like you more than I hate Dan." Laura glared at me for this next part. "I think we can put some things aside."

Reggie squirmed across the floor through the ice cream and pulled us close into a rather uncomfortable sticky hug. And yet, all was calm, until the front door was kicked in and all of a sudden five grown men in uniforms were shouting at us weapons drawn. The rest of the night was a blur of red and blue.

Want to know a secret? I still hated Fridays. Seriously, a supposed time for relaxing, hanging out, socializing, and whatever else people do with friends after high school. But even worse now, I don't even have the luxury of doing nothing now. Every Friday right after class I get home, get changed, have a quick meal with my mom, and then I head 20 minutes out to the newly reopened again Scoops-A-Plenty. My new unpaid job. The entire salary I would typically be earning is instead being used to repair the damages we caused a few weeks ago. Luckily Laura vouched for us with the store owner. She told me it was either this or juvie which she sternly warned me against the latter. I walked in and Laura was already putting the last of the ice cream buckets into the counter.

"Looks like I beat you on opening up again!" she proudly boasted.

"Only you could turn getting to work into a competition."

"Don't complain cause you're losing. I know you're keeping score too."

That was true, we had a tally over everything: dodgeball hit scores, middle school good behavior stickers, who can get to class first, etc. I was beginning to cook up my next comeback but then Reggie came walking in. His hair was now dyed a deep blue, but more importantly was that he was carrying something valuable.

"Hey, think fast you two. I got a surprise!"

He reached into the box and tossed each of us a wrapped strawberry cream puff. The most superior of all snacks that Laura and I are still trying to get him to admit are good. I think the only reason he buys them is because he realized it's the only thing she and I can bond over. He made his way over to window and flicked the switch to open which marked the beginning of our shift. Then we gathered up and waited. The only sound to be heard was the soft whir of machinery and the hum of fluorescent lighting. We all agreed to mute the radio until customers arrive.

"Hey Reggie, how much longer do we have to do this?" I ask.

"Should be about a few more months now."

"God, we're going to be here all school year at this point," Laura complained.

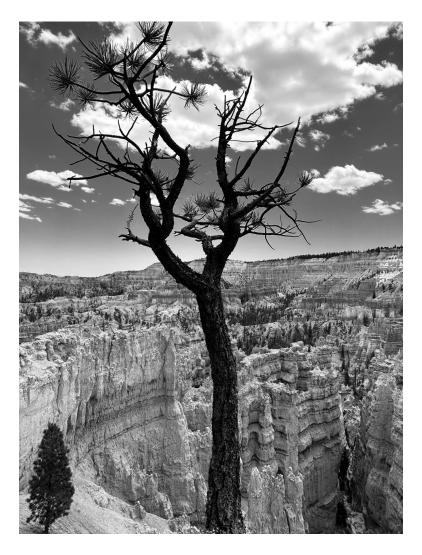
A collective groan harmonized between the three of us. But as I looked around, I realized that right here is everything I envisioned a Friday would be like. Truthfully it was everything I could've ever wanted. Well, maybe Fridays aren't so bad after all.



Contemplating the Cloud Sculptures, Mona Weber



Autumn's SunDay, Karen Smith Hupp



Lonely, Susan Strickland



Sheep Dip

Mark Blickley

Corporal Toby Weydig was lazy. Some people might think of him as a good person or a bad person, but everyone acquainted with Corporal Weydig would agree that he was extremely indolent.

In May of 1970, Toby was discharged from the Army after honorably completing his two-year draft obligation. Although Toby's two years of military service coincided with some of the bloodiest fighting of the Vietnam War, the closest Corporal Weydig ever got to Southeast Asia were his weekly visits to the Thai restaurant, The Golden Triangle, located about a half-mile beyond the gates of Fort Dix in southern New Jersey.

Toby was crazy about the restaurant's seafood noodle cuisine and the proprietor's long-legged daughter, Bobbi.

Corporal Weydig spent his entire two-year tour of duty at Fort Dix, an infantry training facility that turned out human fodder for the war. As a trainee, Toby was slotted for a platoon in Vietnam until he heard a rumor while working KP in the fort's huge kitchen facility. A fat and likeable mess sergeant advised Toby that in order to get out of the Army, all one had to do was to pee in bed every night. The overweight cook insisted that a medical discharge would be awarded for chronic bed wetting.

The cook may have been telling the truth, or perhaps he enjoyed the thought of headquarters being bombarded with urine-stained sheets. Toby Weydig promptly wet his bed for twenty-seven consecutive days. Not having to get up at night to go to the bathroom certainly appealed to the young recruit.

Toby wasn't offered a discharge. However, he was pulled off infantry orders at the completion of boot camp and assigned to the fort's vast laundry service. His first sergeant, who truly disliked Toby, told him that he was promoted to corporal because of his expertise in cleansing out the nocturnal wet-dream emissions of homesick recruits who refused to swallow their libido-busting daily allotment of saltpeter tablets. Toby shrugged off the cruel sarcasm and his first sergeant's contempt for him, reasoning that it was much easier than having to shrug off shrapnel and jungle fungus.

When May 8th arrived, Corporal Toby Weydig became plain old Toby Weydig.

Despite his lack of combat experience, Toby noticed

that his separation paperwork repeatedly listed the phrase, Vietnam Era Veteran. The words made Toby proud, and he remembered a conversation he had with the beautiful Asian waitress, Bobbi. She once expressed admiration and concern for all the young boys who were being filtered through Fort Dix to fight in such a horrible war. Toby, in a rare instance of defensive posturing, drew himself up and staring into Bobbi's eyes stated, "Listen Bobbi, when the Viet Cong hit the Jersey Shore who do you think is going to repel them?" She laughed, then Toby laughed too, but he didn't think it was so funny.

Toby was happy to leave the military but was financially depressed. He had saved nothing from his paltry paychecks the past two years. Before boarding a bus that would take him into the New York City Port Authority Bus Terminal on 42nd Street, Toby called his father.

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"Hello, Pop."
"Toby?"
"Yeah."
"How's it going, son?"
"There's nothing free here, Toby. You got a job lined up?"
"Not yet, Pop. But I'm going to get one as soon as I return."
"Return where?"
"I was hoping you and Ma could put me up for a short time
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while I look for work."

His father grunted into the telephone, place his hand over the mouthpiece, and shouted something to Toby's mother. Although Toby couldn't make out his mother's muffled reply, her tone didn't sound encouraging.

"Your mother wants to know how long you're planning to stay."

"Christ, Pop, I'm just asking for a few days, maybe a week or so until I can find my own place. Gimme a break, will ya?"

"Hey, Toby, the only reason why you ended up down at Dix was because you were too lazy to take your SATs and get your ass into college like everyone else. Chasing skirts was more important, right? Your mother and I begged you for five years to get a lousy part-time job. Did you?"

Toby wrinkled his forehead and pressed the receiver against his temple. "I made my own money." he muttered.

"That's right," said his father. "But I don't count selling nickel bags and mescaline in the school locker room as gainful employment. How do we know that you've changed? I don't want no twenty-one-year-old mooching off me. You're not a kid, Toby. You're a man."

Toby stared at his reflection in the telephone booth. "Look, Pop, if you don't respect me, at least respect the uniform I'm wearing. Let me prove that I've changed. All I'm asking for is a few days to get myself organized. That's all. I respect myself now, Pop. I want you and Ma to respect me too."

"Okay," said his father and hung up the phone.

It upset Toby that he would have to spend his first summer of freedom in two years working at some stupid job. The more Toby thought about his impending summer drudgery, the more outraged he became.

Monday morning, Toby's parents were pleased to see him up and dressed way before his 9:30 appointment at the Veterans Administration's employment office. His father was annoyed by his son's three-day growth of beard, but Toby explained that he was sick of his military look and his facial hair had nothing to do with a lack of pride in his military service but that the hippie girls he was anxious to meet would be turned off by his military look. Hopefully, a beard would be a quick fix solution, at least until his hair grew out.

The lobby of the VA counseling services was already crowded by the time Toby arrived. All of the young men seated within the semi-circle of chairs had long hair and were dressed in shorts or blue jeans. Toby felt like a freak because of his close-cropped hair, sports jacket and tie. Some of his fellow veterans gave Toby a mock salute, which he returned with a grin. A tall, thin veteran around Toby's age with greasy long hair and a bushy moustache walked over and extended his hand.

"Hi. My name's James, but friends call me Mr. Jimmy. First timer?"

Toby nodded and shook the man's hand. "I'm Toby."

"Which branch did you escape from, Toby?"

"Army. And you?"

"Same."

"Mr. Jimmy, how come everybody's dressed so...relaxed at an employment office?"

Mr. Jimmy grinned and glanced over at the receptionist. "Are you really looking for work?"

"I have no goddamn choice. I'm broke."

"That's not true, Toby. You look like a smart guy."

"Yeah, so?" Toby was starting to feel a bit uncomfortable with Mr. Jimmy and the rest of his brothers-in-arms.

"Knowledge is power," whispered Mr. Jimmy.

"I don't need power. I need cash," replied Toby.

"You ever hear of UCX?"

"No. What's that, Mr. Jimmy?"

"It's a huge government tit," giggled Mr. Jimmy, "that you can suck on for a long time if you stroke it right and don't pull too hard."

Mr. Jimmy lit up a cigarette and offered one to Toby. Toby shook his head but listened intently as Mr. Jimmy explained that UCX was a special unemployment program for returning veterans. It guaranteed them an eight-one dollar a week check for six months while they looked for work. Mr. Jimmy said

there was a special UCX line at the state unemployment office so that unlike regular benefit seekers, there was no long and annoying wait. He claimed that picking up checks every two weeks was fast and painless.

Toby was shocked. "Wow. Six months is a long time and that's pretty good money."

Mr. Jimmy laughed so loud the receptionist at the far side of the room looked over at him. "I'm on my ninth month, man. I'm here because I need to get approval for another three-month extension. The state makes you clear with a VA rep before cutting you more checks after your six months has lapsed. Every guy you see is here for another extension on their account. You're the only rookie here today."

"But doesn't the employment counselor try to hook you up with work?"

"Nah, he's cool. He doesn't give a shit. Besides, he just runs the same old tired jobs over and over again on his viewfinder. People think we Vietnam Vets are all crazy dope smoking fiends on the brink of violence. Guys offering real jobs don't register with the VA office."

"That sounds great," said Toby. "But there's one problem. I'm not a Vietnam Vet. I spent my tour at a fort in New Jersey."

Mr. Jimmy shrugged. "So what? I was stationed in California. I pissed into the Pacific Ocean a few times, so maybe something of me made it over to Southeast Asia. But it doesn't matter where you served, it's when you served. As long as it was during wartime, a jungle grunt shooting his ass off for thirteen months, or a stateside paper shuffler like me both get

the same benefits."

Their conversation was interrupted by a shout of "Mr. Weydig!" The two men shook hands as Toby headed towards the employment counselor's office.

Mr. Jimmy had spoken the truth. Early the next morning Toby was down at the state unemployment office, inaugurating his UCX account.

The unemployment office was located in Englewood, a Bergen County city Toby detested. When he walked inside the building, he couldn't believe how jammed it was. There were more than a dozen lines stretching from the teller's stations all the way to the front of the building. Toby spotted the overhead sign, UCX, and was pleased to see only eight people standing underneath it.

The clerk, a matronly looking woman about his mother's age smiled and handed him forms to fill out. After completing the paperwork, he returned to the clerk, and she gave him his first check.

"I know that a lot of people don't appreciate what you boys did for our country, but I do," she said.

"Thank you," said Toby.

"I'm glad your horror show is over and that you made it back safely. Welcome home."

Toby smiled at the woman and nodded. While he cashed his check at an Englewood bank, he glanced at his paperwork to see if his non-combatant status was listed anywhere. It

wasn't. In smeared black print it simply stated Vietnam Era Veteran.

The summer turned into a happy dream for Toby. He spent most of it down the Jersey Shore with his buddies, swimming and picking up girls. In the beginning, he pretended to his parents that he was truly searching for employment. He'd leave the house in the morning looking for work, but would often return late in the evening, sunburned, tired and wearing a completely different change of clothes. The truth was revealed weeks later when his father happened upon him filling out his bi-weekly employment search sheet that he had to turn into the unemployment office as proof that he was sincerely looking for job in order to qualify for his benefits.

While his father silently watched, Toby scoured the newspaper help wanted section, copying down the names and addresses of businesses where he supposedly interviewed. The clerks at unemployment never challenged his desire to find work, but his father did. His parents were so upset at their son's deception—theft is the word they used—that they kicked him out of their house.

Deception had become an integral part of Toby's summer of freedom. Once he discovered that he could earn respect and money from the state by pretending to be a warrior, he decided to do the same with his social life. It started as a simple pick-up line for bikini clad beauties on the beach. Quite a few young ladies would offer up comfort to the returned war veteran who was trying to piece his life together after the trauma of unrelenting, senseless combat. Soon Toby was presenting himself as a burnt-out infantry veteran to all he met. After his parents forced him to leave, a World War II veteran who ran a decayed motel near the beach let Toby stay free of charge

in a basement room. It was a solemn gesture of brotherhood between two combat veterans.

If one were to search for something positive to say about Toby at this time, although he was a very lazy young man, he was not a lazy liar. It was amazing how much energy he poured into his new persona.

Accepting the limitations of his imagination and ignorance, he'd spend hours at the library, reviewing newspaper microfilm that chronicled the war during his two years at Fort Dix. Toby took such copious notes that one would think he was a dedicated actor researching a challenging role.

As the summer came to a close, a new Toby Weydig had emerged. A kind of bitterness crept inside this world weary twenty-one-year-old veteran. He was upset at his parents for kicking him out. He loved to tell the story of their cruel indifference to their returning warrior son and was quite successful soliciting support and sympathy from both men and women whenever he offered up his torrid tale of disrespect and rejection.

Less than three weeks after moving in with friends renting a dilapidated house in Bergenfield, Toby was notified by the New Jersey Department of Unemployment that his benefits were being terminated for falsifying his work search sheet. He felt as if his entire world had imploded, a world based on the gratuitous respect for his military exploits. His roommates offered him little comfort.

"Big deal, get a job," said Jeffrey. "I got a job. You've got to kick in your share of the rent. The last guy we roomed with fell down on his share. We bailed him out for a few months and

then he skipped on us. We're not carrying you, Toby. We can't afford it."

"It's not having to find work that upsets me, Jeffrey. It's the indifference of a government who can send out into a killing field and then suddenly call me a liar and a fraud and take away the one measly comfort I earned. Earned! I earned those checks! I'm not going to be disrespected by the same people I put my life on the line for. I was abused in war. I will not be abused in peace!

Jeffrey shrugged. "Speaking of abuse, how about cleaning out the sink after you trim your beard? When I went to wash my face this morning I almost puked. It felt like I was dipping my face into a urinal filled with pubes because sometimes it smells like you pissed in the sink."

Toby's sorrow at losing his benefits turned into total fear as his appointment with the claims examiner drew closer. He knew that everyone thought of Vietnam Vets as deranged assholes, and by God, he was going to scare the sonofabitch who was trying to terminate his benefits into extending his unemployment account. On the way to his appointment, Toby Weydig did something he had not done in many years. He entered a church to pray for help. It was called The Good Shepherd Assembly of Englewood and was located a block and a half from the unemployment office.

The small church was dimly light. Its light came from the concentrated bunches of candles burning beneath beautifully crafted tableaus and icons scattered about the church. All of the religious mosaics, sculptures, and paintings depicted a bearded, loving shepherd tending his flock. Toby was so moved by the quiet, peaceful atmosphere that he dropped into

a pew and sat for many minutes with his eyes closed, his head resting against the smooth wooden bench. The comforting coolness of early morning dew seemed to be ingrained into the fine wood; the foul, wincing headache that Toby had taken to bed and still gripped his skull suddenly vanished.

With the disappearance of his headache, Toby leaned forward inside the pew and opened up his eyes. He noticed that his anger had also disappeared, and with it, his anxiety over his impending confrontation with the claims examiner. Viewing all the images of the good shepherd, he knew that he had to choose between good and evil, to take a moral stance with that New Jersey civil servant's interrogation that was less than an hour away. Toby smiled, bowed his head, and ran out of the church of the The Good Shepherd Assembly and straight to the Englewood Public Library's reference department.

The librarian apologized for the lack of materials she had concerning sheep, but she did lead Toby to a hopeful wall of shelves lined with encyclopedias. Hope turned to help as Toby borrowed some scrap paper and a pencil and began to furiously jot down facts about sheep. He scribbled away until it was time to leave for the interview.

On the walk over to the unemployment office, Toby read and re-read his library research, pulling out phrases and facts that he recited like a mantra. Right before he pushed open the claims examiner's cubicle door, he slipped his sheep list inside his UCX folder and took a deep breath. Seated behind a cluttered desk was a man who rose to shake his hand. The chunky claims examiner appeared to be about forty with a neatly trimmed moustache and a Prince Valiant hairstyle. The man's glassy green eyes were highlighted by deep set circles

of black. The hand he extended was weak and Toby noticed its pale, effeminate smoothness and size.

"The name's Moolins, Dennis Moolins," he said. "And you are Toby Weydig?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Moolins eyed every inch of Toby's appearance. His inspection ended when he glared directly into Toby's face. Toby remembered what a pamphlet from that very office had stated about successful job interviews and proceeded to direct his own glare at the bridge of the man's nose as he was offered a seat.

"You know why were called into this office don't you, Mr. Weydig?"

"I believe I'm being accused of fraud, sir."

Mr. Moolins lifted a fistful of papers from a folder. "I personally called these lists of potential employers you've submitted when picking up your checks and not one can verify that you had applied for work with their organization. Can you come up with a word other than fraud to describe my investigation, Mr. Weydig? May I call you Toby?

Toby nodded.

"You can call me Dennis. I'll be glad to listen to any explanation you can offer for not searching for work, Toby, but based on the evidence-or rather the lack of evidence-for your job searches, I'm afraid I have no choice but to terminate your unemployment benefits."

Toby pinched open his UCX folder and peeked inside. "Are you going to defend your behavior, Toby? Asked Mr. Moolins as he returned to his desk and began to scribble something onto an official-looking piece of paper.

"Defend, Mr. Moolins? I defended my country for two years and now that I've returned home, I'm being forced to defend myself against the same government that sent me to fight its war? Is that what you're asking me to do, Mr. Moolins?"

The claims examiner stopped writing and look up at his client. "This isn't a battle, Toby. It's simply an inquiry into the truth, the truth of your honest search for employment. I conduct these weekly interviews with both veterans and non-veterans.

"Are you a military man, Mr. Moolins?"

"I never served in the Armed Forces, if that's what you asking. But I do respect you fellas who did," he added, somewhat defensively.

"Do you respect how war can change a person, Mr. Moolins?"

"Yes, but I don't classify lying and cheating your government for undeserved benefits as a legitimate change in a warrior's mentality. Do you, Toby?"

"My change came from the brutality I witnessed. If I was to find employment that's directly connected to my military service, I'd have to find work as a butcher."

Moolins glanced at Toby's file. "Butcher's probably the only occupation you didn't list on your fictious job search forms.

"No, sir. There's one more. One true job, the only career where I know I'd be able to excel and utilize the intense changes resulting from my combat experience."

"And what would that job be, Toby?"

"Shepherd."

Moolins raised his eyebrows. "Did I hear you correctly, Toby? You did say shepherd, as in one tends sheep?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm afraid you're living in the wrong part of the country if tending sheep is to be your life's work, Toby."

"But this is my home, Mr. Moolins!" Toby rose from his seat and placed his hands on the investigator's desk. "Are you saying that I'm responsible for the accident of my New Jersey birth?"

"Please be seated, Mr. Weydig." The claims examiner stared into Toby's eyes in an attempt to intimidate him.

"Let's say I could find a situation where you could perform shepherding duties. What sort of knowledge or expertise in the shepherding profession could you offer a potential employer?" Toby smiled. "I'm an expert on sheep, sir. My only respite from the war were the hours I spent assisting monks at a Buddhist temple, helping them tend their sheep."

"You don't say?" smirked Moolins.

Toby nodded. "Did you know that sheep are not only eventempered, but even toed?

"No, I'm completely unaware of that information," said Moolins as he began to fidget in his chair.

"Are you a religious man, Mr. Moolins?"

"I don't think that... well, I suppose I am."

"Then you must be aware that sheep are referred to more often than any other animal in the Bible."

Moolins smiled and jotted a sentence into his file report. "So, you're telling me you've had hands-on experience as a shepherd?"

"Yes, sir. As a matter of fact, the most moving moment of my life occurred when I dipped a newborn lamb's umbilical cord in iodine to prevent infection. It made me feel full."

The claims examiner rattled some papers on his desk. "Your file is also pretty full, Toby, and the animal that the New Jersey Bureau of Unemployment Benefits associates with your name isn't lamb, but bull."

Toby leapt from his seat. "I don't care what you think of me or what names you call me, but how dare you mock the

sweetest of God's creatures! Sheep are sacred beings Mr. Moolins, and I'm more than proud of the time I spent trying to control their foot rot by my tedious trimming of their fungus infested feet! Or blue tongue. Have you ever seen a lamb with that horrible disease? Do you think you're so much better than a sheep? Toby stared at Moolins' stomach. "Well, let me tell you, one of the most common diseases that inflicts them is overeating, so don't try to distance yourself too much from those sweet and joyful souls!

Moolins jabbed a thumb into the excess of flesh under his chin. "Calm down, Mr. Weydig. This is a claims investigation, not an inquisition."

"Take away my benefits, withhold my money, but don't taunt me for telling you the truth about the first animal to be domesticated by man 11,000 years ago in southwestern Asia!" Toby paused for a breath and a sigh while grinding his teeth, trying to buy enough time to recall more sheep encyclopedia facts without having to peek at his folder.

"Calm down, Toby. I'm just trying to help you find relief from your nightmarish rut of unemployment."

"Mr. Moolins, do you know what the word rut means to a shepherd?"

Moolins tilted his head slightly, as if viewing Toby from a different angle. "No, I don't, Mr. Weydig. I just want you to make an honest buck, that's all. What does rut mean to a practitioner of herding sheep?"

Toby bit down on his lip, flared his nostrils and once again jumped up to place his hands on the desk, leaning forwards

towards the examiner in a manner some might consider threatening. "A rut is the period of sexual excitement in sheep, and a buck is what you call a male of the species. If you think I'm in a rut to make a buck, then you have me figured out all wrong. I can assure you that my impulses are quite healthy and normal. I adore women!"

"I'm glad for you," said the confused civil servant. "I didn't mean to be insulting. Relax."

Toby noticed the spreading circle of perspiration staining Moolins' underarms as he put down his pen and gently gestured for Toby to sit. His smile was solicitous and nervous. "I will investigate all the resources at my disposal to find you gainful employment as a shepherd, Mr. Weydig. I promise."

Toby wanted to laugh but bit down on his lip instead. "You know, although sheep are well adapted to cool climates, they could easily adapt to New Jersey's environment because their wool supplies them with an excellent tolerance to heat. A sheep's body temperature is about 102 degrees Fahrenheit, but most importantly, their heat loss comes from evaporation from their respiratory tract. Yes, Mr. Moolins, sheep do sweat somewhat, just like me and you."

Mr. Moolins nodded and rose from his desk and gently ushered Toby to the door. The two shook hands and Toby was handed an envelope that contained his disputed unemployment check. When he shut the door behind him, Moolins grimaced, shook his head, and immediately called his supervisor to advise him that Weydig was a Vietnam nut job who should be allowed to run out his claim without any further interference, at least until a federal government agency could intervene and properly deal with his PTSD.

Summer surrendered to fall and entered winter as Toby's six months claims extension went unchallenged. When Toby's unemployment claims finally expired, he continued to suck on the government teat by evoking his GI bill educational benefits to study acting at New York's prestigious Academy of Dramatic Arts. He had no problem passing his series of entry auditions. While still a first-year Academy student, Toby starred in his first play, a one-act Vietnam War drama produced by the American Theater of Actors, titled "Fresh Fatigues."

Sunshine

Quesera Griffin

My dream man will come to me

With a potato in one hand

And a grapefruit in the other

He'll be wearing a button-down shirt

Perhaps with stripes

Pants held up by a quiet belt or even cool suspenders

He'll be wearing a hat if the day calls for it

His face will be honest

He'll be ready

He'll know that I'm ready

His shoes

Yes, shoes

Any color

Maybe even with round laces

He has such an eye

He knew I'd like all of this

But that's really just who he really is

He'll meet me in the middle of the block

A block lined with houses—some cuter than the next

Some not

That's ok

It's not about the houses

It's about that potato and that grapefruit

He won't say anything

I'll smile but look away

I'll be so happy

Me, my man, a potato and a grapefruit $\,$



Solomons Island, Mona Weber

Trumpets of May

G.H. Mosson

From within these pines
birds surge their melodies
pulsing out in waves and debate
who may be in love
and who flits
on the outside.

Trees are flooded with pleas to nest, with calls to come, with warnings to stay away from inside the shrubs and thorny marshes too, from within thick fir to say:

Who shall sing
from the tiered balconies
of majestic pines, and who
above us swells
in proud chorus
from hilltop beeches.

New Every Morning

Katherine Lassman

I drive a different route to work each day.
Oh, it's all on the same roads, with
the same Benedict Bridge to cross,
but each time it is a different way.
The river could be still or wavy,
sparkling or reflective, whitecapped, gray,
or blue or green. There could be clouds,
all white, or with myriad shades and shadows.
There could be fog that drains the color
from leafy trees on the far side,
unless, of course, they're bare from winter's sleep.
Sometimes there's none of the above,
just bright and simple clarity.
Who knows what each time through will show?
It's all new every morning.

You're Still There

Tanya Whitt

Each time I walked past
I was impressed
You're still there
Through the storm
Through the rain
Through the heat
And probably pain
I was shivering cold in the snow and ice
Soaking wet
But you were still there
With your plastic bags and blue tarp
As your protector

About a week ago
I saw your tarp was full of holes
It made me think
Has your time come to an end of being on the street?
Of surviving all these years
Even through the entire pandemic
I know I hadn't been there in a while
The last time I walked by
You were still there

I had an unction that I needed to go and check on you
On my usual way to work
When I made my final trip to see you
My heart jumped and I saw
that your spot by the wall was empty
In that moment, I felt despair

My final fear had come to past
You had been forced out
Because I counted on you to be there
Now you were gone
And I reflected on how the tide had changed
And the climate had finally done it

Dead deer, do not eat.

Giada Hicks

I see the shooting target in their yard.

A deer. A full-grown stag. Supposedly.

It's not my fault; I see the indents and holes that hold the mark of a BB-gun or even a rifle.

I see myself there, shot up for practice of sport.

Or wrapped around the practice target like a shield. My small child body being pierced without err or hesitation.

I don't cry or wail.

Silence falls over me, save for needy gasps of air as pleural fluid and blood fill my lungs in a sickening mocktail, quieting me once more.

My body mutilated as the exit wound looks like a Christmas ribbon, curled and blooming like a chrysanthemum.

My martyristic embrace doesn't prevent the inanimate object from being penetrated again. Just, another problem in the way. Flesh, Feelings, Forgiveness.

The gun that sits at the hand of the boy doesn't startle. His hands don't shake. *This, was set in stone*.

My small limbs ragdoll over the carved foam like a Disney princess as my breaths fall short and shaky.

This was meant to be.

Left for dead near a cabin in the woods, dusty dirt roads lag in my mind as I know I won't be allowed to die in public on the I-495.

Back in the recess of a childhood memory, near the old and dilapidated play set. Broken arms and broken hearts.

Oh dear, I was never meant to keep you safe. We were never meant to be whole. You were never meant to be more than what I couldn't handle.

Window Pain

Kaitlin Dunaway

The light shines through, illuminating bits and pieces of what I've become, fitting together to create a colorful array.

But what if I shattered it and started anew? Glass shards litter the floor. They cut my feet, but I've grown immune to the pain.

Stained glass remnants of my past.
Was the shatter heard in the heavens?
I desecrate this place in hopes that God hears my final plea:

I'm done being broken.

Gravestone

Kate Sine

Home is becoming a graveyard, and I, its keeper, tending to the memories, telling strangers stories, growing heavier year by year as a new name is carved into me until one day I become a gravestone too



The Fort, Heather Christian



Waves, Diane Payne

Contributors

MARK BLICKLEY grew up within walking distance of New York's Bronx Zoo. He is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild, PEN American Center, and Veterans for Responsible Leadership. His latest book is the flash fiction collection, *Hunger Pains* (Buttonhook Press).

HEATHER BOUGHER, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor and Art History at CSM.

HEATHER CHRISTIAN is a CSM alumna and an art enthusiast.

JAMES COLEMAN is 21 years old and in his final year at CSM. He is an English major as he aspires to be a writer and novelist with dreams of turning this into his career and hopefully write for TV and even movies.

SHERBIE CORAZZA serves on an international program supporting the U.S. Navy and Royal Australian Air Force. Her greatest loves are her wife and their six children. She is thankful for the opportunity to share small joys and linger in moments of gratitude with all of you.

KAITLIN DUNAWAY was born on July 5, 1991. She obtained her associate degree in general studies in 2012. She also obtained an associate degree in nursing in 2017. After the loss of her husband in 2023, she realized she no longer felt connected to nursing. She is currently hoping to pursue a bachelor's in English with a minor in creative writing.

QUESERA GRIFFIN was born and raised in New York City.

Griffin was just four years old when she created her first poem. Currently raising three children, Griffin says "I don't write as much as I'd like. But, despite anything life throws my way, I'll always circle back to my safe space—writing."

GIADA HICKS is a freshman in college. She's interested in creative and poetic writing, traveling the world, and putting her fantastical heart out into the world by whatever means necessary.

TRU HOLLAND is 18 years old and currently enrolled in CSM. "I am currently pursuing an associate degree in English. I have enjoyed books ever since I was a toddler, and though I couldn't read then, I would be perfectly content, sitting on the floor, looking at my books. This admiration of books among other types of written works has continued to this day. I like to work on stories and poems from time to time and hope to eventually become a professional writer."

ZANE D. KING is 20 years old and is autistic. "I am a student at CSM who explores the world with a creative outlook. I have digitally illustrated original characters and written personal screenplays and other forms of literature. I've also written a personal script called 'The Convulsive Investigation and the Frantic Congregation,' which was featured in a high school event based on literature called PAXpression. In 2024, I participated in an art exhibit at CSM, in which I displayed my works, 'Stopping in Motion' and 'Gouache Garden.' My aim after pursuing my education goals is to become a screenplay writer and director for animated films."

KATHERINE LASSMAN is a writing tutor with the CSM Learning Support Services staff. She holds an MFA in creative writing from George Mason University and is the author

of the poetry collection *Dawn Anyway*. Lassman lives in Waldorf, Maryland, with her husband and three spoiled rotten cats named Joy, Grace, and Zany.

WILLIAM MILLER is a poet. His eighth collection of poetry, The Crow Flew Between Us, was published by Kelsay Books in 2020. Miller's poems have appeared in the Penn Review, The Southern Review, Shenandoah, Prairie Schooner, and West Branch. He lives and writes in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

G.H. MOSSON is the author of three books and three chapbooks of poetry, including *Singing the Forge* (David Robert Books, 2025), *Family Snapshot as a Poem in Time* (Finishing Line Press, 2019), and *Questions of Fire* (Plain View Press, 2009). His poetry and reviews have appeared widely in periodicals, and his poetry has been nominated four times for the Pushcart Prize. He lives in Maryland. For more, visit www.ghmosson.com.

DIANE PAYNE is a full-time marketing specialist for the Marketing Department at CSM.

LILY RIDGELL is a CSM alum and recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Interpretive Biology from Frostburg State University. She is a poet, dog mom, and wildlife enthusiast.

GABRIEL RODRIGUEZ is a produce manager who likes to take pictures and adventure all over the country when he can.

KATE SINE is a poet based in Southern Maryland, where she lives with her husband and their four cats. She received her bachelor's degree in English from Frostburg State University

and has work published in *Maryland Bard Poetry Review*, *HNDL Magazine*, *Gypsophila Zine*, and *Connections Literary Magazine*.

RACHEL SMITH is a Professor of English at CSM, a mother, grandmother, friend, teacher, writer, runner, and she believes there can never be too many candles in one room.

KAREN SMITH HUPP has worked at the College of Southern Maryland for 25 years, currently in government relations and as an adjunct instructor. Since her college days learning the basics of her DSLR as part of her journalism courses, Smith Hupp has kept a keen eye behind the lens seeking those once-in-a-lifetime images. In the process, she has discovered that every image is worth a thousand memories.

DONNA SPERRY is in her 28th year at CSM teaching mathematics!

SUE STRICKLAND was a Mathematics Professor at CSM from 2001 until her retirement in 2019. Now that she is retired, she enjoys walking every day and traveling, always on the lookout for interesting shots along the way.

RICHARD TAYLOR has retired from Mail, Shipping, and Receiving for Operations and Planning at CSM.

MONA WEBER believes one should never stop taking a moment to appreciate the beauty of nature. She finds inspiration in travel, echoing Gustave Flaubert's reminder that "you see what a tiny place you occupy in the world." From discovering creeks, rivers, and mounds of history in Southern Maryland to embracing day-to-day journeys on Route 4 or 5, Weber sees adventure everywhere. For her, travel never

ends—it's simply a matter of perspective.

CHELSEA WHITT graduated from Johns Hopkins University last May and is currently working on a collection of ekphrastic poetry for a local art gallery. She is encouraged by signs of God's divinity, her favorite Robin Williams movies, and learning to make quality education more accessible.

TANYA WHITT is a mother, grandmother, wife, and mental health professional. She sings gospel music and creates song lyrics based on biblical texts. Occasionally, Whitt uses the acrostic format to write poems and teach scripture.



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