

The Pen

Department of English and Theatre
University of South Carolina, Beaufort
One University Boulevard
Bluffton, South Carolina

uscb.edu

Editors: Samantha Clevinger

David Goff

Cover Photograph By: Chelsea Mummert

Special thanks to Dr. Ellen Malphrus,
our faculty sponsor.

This Edition of *The Pen*
is dedicated in honor of:

Dr. Carl P. Eby

Thank you, and
“cheers”.

Table of Contents:

Spring 2013

Written Works

Rusalka

By: Alyse Bingham

“We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.”
*“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T. S. Eliot, lines
129-31*

Rusalka: an elemental creature; a water nymph;
a sprite

that dwells in a body of water, widely infamous for their song.

Caspian Sea, Russia

1836

Duscha rose from the depths of the sea, led by her bond-sister, Lena. Their heads broke the dark surface of the water mere inches away from the bow of a ship, the *Otkazat'sya*¹. Lena drew herself up and took hold of the line, the emerald scales on her body glowing a pale silver in the moonlight. She began to ascend, making room for Duscha. When she did not follow right away, Lena looked down, her face obscured by her raven hair.

“Are you not coming?”

“Are you quite sure this is the ship that took him?”

“There is only one ship here. Besides, all humans are filthy savages. Either way, they deserve a much less honorable death than we will give them.”

A man's shout and the sound of leather striking flesh split the still air, followed by a shocked hush. Lena moved from the line to allow Duscha enough room to climb up. They looked over the battered rail at the mob of sailors before them. One held a long, leather whip stained with blood so crimson it appeared black even under the light of the lanterns. The bos'n slowly lowered the whip and backed away from the growing pool of blood.

¹ Abandoned

“It’s a rusalka!”

The other sailors whispered amongst themselves as the bos’n² crossed himself. As they backed away from the blood, Duscha and Lena could make out the form of a man. A sailor dropped his torch and the sapphire scales on the prisoner’s arms reflected the flames, casting an unnatural violet hue on the deck.

“Boryenka,” Lena breathed, her nails digging into the railing. Duscha felt numb; she’d never seen another rusalka bleed before, let alone at the hands of a human.

“He still lives,” she finally murmured. “We must act now.”

Lena nodded, her eyes glowing as chrysoberyls. She pushed herself over the railing, her tail making a dull thud on the deck. A soft cracking sound filled Duscha’s skull as Lena grabbed her wrist. The scales on their tails split down the middle and pulled apart, forming two shapely legs. Duscha bent double over the rail, gasping for breath and willing back tears.

I am sorry, Duscha, but it must be done. Those we cannot lure, we must execute by hand.

She nodded her understanding and awkwardly stepped over the rail. The throbbing began to fade, but she faced the

² Informal ‘boatswain’: (n) – a petty officer on a merchant ship or warrant officer on a warship who is responsible for the maintenance of the ship and its equipment

sky and screamed. The piercing cry morphed slowly into a mournful, yet captivating resonance and the sailors turned towards it, entranced. Their eyes lost their focus and they drug their feet towards Duscha.

“You fools!” The captain ran towards them, waving his arms wildly. “Stop where you-”

A moist gasp silenced him as a small, curved dagger slit his throat. He fell to his knees, revealing Lena behind him.

Louder!

Duscha’s voice rose until the lanterns and windows began to shatter. The sailors already caught in her enchantment ran for the rail, laughing, and a dozen large splashes greeted Duscha’s ears. Satisfied her task was done, she moved toward Lena, who cradled Boryenka’s head.

“He is fading quickly,” she murmured, stroking his cheek. He turned his head towards her voice and she kissed him softly.

“Will he be able to descend without worsening his condition?”

“Yes.” Boryenka’s voice was barely a whisper, so different from the deep, husky tone she remembered from their childhood. “I am not dead yet.” He made an effort to stand, but, unaccustomed to legs, he faltered. Lena helped him rise, and guided him to the rail. As he slowly lowered himself on the line, she looked back at Duscha.

“Slay the rest. We will wait for you at the citadel.”

“I understand.”

It wasn't until Lena too had disappeared under the gentle waves that Duscha realized just how cold the air above the sea was. It bit into her soft flesh and tore at her hair. Eager to escape it, she slowly moved down the stairs into the bowels of the *Otkazat'sya*.

The air was warmer, humid, but something was wrong, and she could not discern what it was. There was no one left on the decks, in the galley, or the hold. She ventured lower into the brig and stood for a moment, concentrating on the foreign sounds around her. The entire ship groaned and shifted, echoes of the stress of water against wood resounding throughout the hull. But there was one resonance that was created by something other than the ship. The sequential thuds grew louder and she turned swiftly, decapitating the bos'n with a machete that had been hanging on the cell wall beside her just seconds ago. The head bounced off his shoulder and the body crumpled in an inglorious heap. Movement from the cell behind her caught her attention and she strode toward it, machete raised defensively.

Inside lie a man with similar wounds as Boryenka, but his blood was so bright, Duscha felt the urge to touch it. Unlike rusalka blood, his was thin and separated quickly. She rolled him over with one hand; the other still grasped the blade. Soft

hazel eyes met hers, silently begging for mercy and she cautiously lowered the weapon. His wounds were older and drier than Boryenka's; he had taken no part in his torture. She began to sing softly, her voice splitting into two different streams of melody and harmony as she untied his hands.

“Who are you?”

She paused and shrugged.

“I was sent here to kill you.”

“Who wasn't?”

Duscha said nothing.

“Where are the others?”

“Dead.”

“By your hand.”

“No. By my voice.”

He backed away, his eyes focusing on her for the first time.

“Rusalka.” She nodded, her onyx eyes unblinking. “You came after the other one . . . Boryenka.” Duscha nodded. “Did he live?”

“Yes.”

They stared at each other in silence for a long while before he made a move to stand. Duscha watched, fascinated as he painstakingly pulled himself up along the bars of the cell.

“A little help?” She shook her head.

“I would only bring you down.”

He finally stood, towering over Duscha, who, for an instant, regretted that she hadn't killed him as well. He was powerfully built; his solid chest and muscular arms were revealed through large, blood-encrusted gashes in his shirt. He slowly reached down and picked up the machete, turning the hilt over in his hand before returning it to Duscha.

"What are you going to do with the ship?" She heard the unasked question that lingered in his mind, on his tongue.

"Me or my kind?"

"Both."

"I . . . I would have you take the ship to port and have it burned. My kind . . ." She swallowed hard. The moisture had left her mouth and each breath was becoming a battle with the dry air. "They would destroy you both."

The walls of the cell began to close in around her, and panic mixed with bile rose in her throat. An earsplitting pounding in her temples added to her alarm. As her sight narrowed and faded, she looked down; her legs had fused themselves back into a sleek, pearlescent tail. She felt herself rise; she was jostled about, then fell from a great height. The last thing she glimpsed before cold, inky darkness took her was the human's face falling away from hers.



Duscha awoke to find Hedeon, Boryenka's brother, hovering over her, his pale face twisted into a scowl. His dark eyes bored into hers, as if he was filtering through the contents of her soul. He finally broke eye contact and turned away.

"She lives, but bears the stench of a human."

His powerful baritone seemed to pass through her as though her physical body had ceased to exist. Lena appeared to her right and slapped Duscha across the face.

"You pathetic whore! You spared one!" Her mind still reeling, Duscha moaned.

"He had done no wrong-"

Lena raised her hand to strike her again.

"He bore the same scars as Boryenka!" Duscha shouted defiantly.

Someone caught Lena's hand midstrike. Boryenka moved forward, giving Lena a reproving glare.

"He was still in the cell when you found him?" Confused, Duscha nodded. "Kiril. He tried to get me off the ship but was caught. He disapproved of their plans for me."

"What plans were those, brother?"

"Flay me and sell my hide to traders." Lena cursed under her breath. Hedeon nodded, but Boryenka frowned. "I am sorry, Duscha, but you were wrong to spare him."

"But-"

"It doesn't matter. He has seen us. And he is *human*."

“But he tried to get you off the ship. And he saved my life.”

The others stared at her in shock and Duscha put a hand over her mouth.

Forfeit.

“Then,” Boryenka began, “your life is his.” Hedeon left and returned not a minute later with a large pearl on a silver chain. Boryenka lowered it over her head, and Duscha fought back tears of shame and rage.

Forfeit.

“You will be adorned with the product of pain.”

The chain became icy against her skin, but the pearl warmed.

Forfeit.

“I’m sorry it had to end this way,” Lena murmured, backing away. Duscha looked to Hedeon, who did not meet her pleading gaze.

“You must leave before the Council hears of what you have done,” Boryenka said gently. “We will maintain ignorance, but it will only be a matter of time before they find you.”

Forfeit.

Numb, Duscha turned and swam upward through the blackness toward the silver disk that humans called a moon. She broke the surface of the sea and found herself gasping for air.

Air.

She felt a strange sensation in her tail, and realized that it was gone, split permanently into legs a second time. She thrashed around for what seemed like an eternity before something plucked her out of the water.

“Ni figa sebe! Who are you?”

“Duscha,” she choked out. She looked up and found herself staring into the face of the man who had saved her the night before. “Kiril?”

Alarm was evident in his eyes even though his face was plunged into shadow by a passing cloud.

“Yes . . . Why are you here?” He looked down at her feet. “Like this?”

Forfeit.

“I . . . have been exiled.”

Guilt flashed across Kiril’s features as the clouds parted for an instant.

“For sparing my life.”

“No. No, not entirely.” She let out a shaky sigh and wrapped her arms around her legs, drawing her knees up to her chin. “Perhaps it is better this way.”

She glanced up and caught Kiril staring at the pearl. She met his eyes and he quickly looked away.

“You can take it. I don’t want it.” She reached up to wrench it off and felt arcs of electricity course through her

body. She tore her hand away, tilted her face upwards and let out a howl. She began to sob tearlessly and felt warmth encircle her. Kiril slowly ran his hand through her still wet locks and for a reason Duscha could not fathom, she felt comforted.

“Forfeit,” she murmured softly, breaking away from his embrace. “My life is yours . . . but this cannot be.”

“I can protect you.”

“No. No one can. Not from them.” She turned away from his beseeching eyes. “They’ll be after you as well.”

“Who?”

“The Council.”

“Why me? Because I saved you?”

“No. Because you saw a rusalka.”

Kiril stared at her.

“We don’t kill your kind because you see us!”

“Don’t you?”

He was silent for a moment, then nodded, conceding her point.

He grasped the oars of the small boat and began to row. As dawn began to arrive, land drew nearer, and Duscha felt her heartbeat quicken. A familiar scent wafted out to sea and she strained to recognize it. The scent suddenly exploded in her mind and she grabbed Kiril’s arm.

“Please, we can’t land here! They are waiting for us!” He followed her gaze to the shore. Seven men, pale as death itself, stood on the beach, holding ornamented swords that glowed a faint pearl hue.

“I will protect you.”

“And who will protect you? This is madness!”

She was jolted forward as the boat landed, parting the sand with a soft hiss. Kiril leapt out and pulled the machete from under his seat. Duscha sat speechless as he turned and charged towards the Council.



Kiril ran forward, ignoring the stinging of the raindrops that pricked his callused skin. He raised the machete to strike a blow against the man in the center, but at the last second, the rusalka deflected the blow and, along with the other six, raised their weapons against him. He spun and ducked under a blade, flicking it out of the hands of its owner and dug the machete into his chest. A piercing shriek nearly deafened him as the rusalka fell and disintegrated into sea foam. Kiril turned and chopped the arm off of another, disregarding the sensation of a dagger being thrust into his skull. The rusalka dropped to the ground, writhing in agony that Kiril heard rather than saw. The remaining five backed away slowly, but not in defeat. The outer

two vaulted into the air, twin blades creating a high-pitched whistle as they missed his neck by mere hairs. He dropped, swinging his blade in a wide arc and meeting resistance as a rusalka lost a leg just below the knee. He rolled, thrusting the machete upwards, catching the second one just under the chin; the blade reappeared through the back of his head, gelatinous grey substance mixing with blood.

He felt a gentle hand on his arm and glanced over. Duscha stood beside him, holding a sword that was no longer in use by a Council member.

“There are more,” she said, turning him to the sea.

A multitude of heads broke the surface of the water, which had begun to churn and crest. They calmly stepped out onto the beach, every one of them armed with either a spear or saber.

“We should surrender. Take the merciful execution.”

“There is naught *merciful* about an *execution*, Duscha.”

“We have no chance of winning, Kiril.” Her dark eyes silently pleaded with him to surrender.

Time seemed to slow as his eyes lost their focus and blood began to pour from his mouth. There was a sickening sound as Duscha saw the blade being withdrawn from his back. She turned to face the one who held the blade.

“Hedeon!”

Her nostrils flared and she made a desperate strike at him which he easily blocked. He grabbed her wrist, his eyes fiery.

“You should be grateful that I have freed you of him!” he shouted over the rising storm. “Any human who becomes one with you deserves death-”

“He didn’t!” she shouted back, too infuriated even for tears.

The wind howled, carving a gulf between them.

“He never became one with me! I saved myself for you, and only you, but now I see what you are.” He dropped the weapon and dropped to his knees, his head bowed.

“I . . . am shamed. End my disgraced life.”

“If I kill you, who will save him?” she questioned, her eyes smoldering. Hedeon looked to Kiril, who was sucking in a labored breath. “Redeem yourself by saving the life you failed to take.”

She ran towards the army amassed on the shore, scooping up a second blade. She stopped just short of them and let out a roar that threw them backwards, a roar filled with anguish and sorrow. They flew back into the waves which swallowed them whole, and for a moment, she could almost believe it was over.

The sea became oddly calm despite the wind and rain. A glow from the depths began to rise and Duscha felt pure, icy terror for the first time in her long life.



The sea around the light shot into the air, defying the wind that was powerless against this new foe. A figure rose, armored in halite. Nothing but the eyes of the juggernaut was visible; they locked onto Duscha's, but she found no hate in them. A soft sigh escaped the helm as it strode forward, a sword as big as she was in the warrior's hands.

I'm sorry it had to end this way.

"L-"

The width of the blade impacted her chest and neck, casting her backwards into a cliff face. The back of her head felt warm and moist to the touch, but it was not a lethal blow.

"Why are you doing this?" she shouted, half-expecting there to be no answer.

"I receive my orders and carry them out. Not obeying was always your fault, and now it has become your downfall."

The arm lifted, and Duscha leapt aside; the sword barely missed her. She looked back towards Kiril and Hedeon; Kiril was sitting up and his pain seemed to have been alleviated.

My heart is forever yours.

They both looked up, the realization of what she was preparing to do dawning on them. She turned away, paying no heed to Kiril's tortured shout. She bounded up to the gladiator, flipped and her blades felt the resistance of the halite armor. She exerted more force and felt the halite give way to flesh, then bone. The armored head was now twisted at an unnatural angle; short, confused cries fell from its mouth. The warrior fell backwards, and the armor became nothing but a shell as sea foam leaked from the joints.

Duscha landed on top of the armor just as a wave the height of a ship's mast crested above her. She allowed herself a smirk as she looked down and fingered the hilt of the sword that the juggernaut had plunged into her heart. The wave closed in around her and she let herself be swept out to sea.



Kiril raced towards the shoreline, Hedeon on his heels. His wounds were nothing compared to the sting that now coursed, raw, through his chest. He ran into the receding waves, jumped, and dove into the abyss. He let himself sink, praying he would find her. A steady stream of bubbles to his right were created by a plummeting figure with a massive sword thrust through their chest. Kiril felt his lungs burning

and his ribcage beginning to succumb to the pressure, but he dove deeper.

Duscha's body came to rest on the floor of the sea, and Kiril knew then she was gone. He made several swipes for her; it was not until another wave crested above them that her body was flung into his arms. His sight began to narrow into a small disk, but he pushed upwards, not allowing himself to fail.

Not now.



Duscha was vaguely aware of air once more, even though her lungs were powerless to suck it in. She felt the cool sand against her back and cheek as she was slowly lowered. Voices nearly drowned out by waves and wind hovered over her. Her head was propped up against something, and she felt warm lips kiss her forehead. It was nearly impossible for her to operate her dying body, but she ordered her eyes to open.

Kiril had buried his face in her hair; she could smell the human faintly. Hedeon was pulling the sword from her heart; she gave an involuntary moan as her flesh released the blade. Kiril's face was now over hers. She reached up, slowly, painfully to touch it.

"Never . . . forget."



Hedeon watched, numb, as Duscha's form disappeared and sea foam filled Kiril's hands. The wind became milder, gentler as a voice laughed softly; the sound faded into the sea. Kiril stared at the sand where she had lain, transfixed. Hedeon followed his gaze to the pearl.

February 21st, 1965

By: D.L. Cid

48 years ago

Why did they do it?

Not so she could work, and you get married,

Not comprehended while living, but celebrated when
buried

Did their message die, or become symbols when carried?

It was about color, not class

And it took their lives to prove it.

48 years ago

Then what was it for?

So I could be your neighbor

And to my own past a stranger

End my livelihood and give you my labor

While the smell of the fruit becomes even stranger

We are accepted by assimilating

And our identity never restored.

48 years later

And what has become of us?

Dreams deferred

Families disturbed

Prosperity preached over good word

While I wonder if the lines were erased, thickened, or
merely blurred

Should we have kept to ourselves?

Because now I see no progress.

The Pen

By: D.L. Cid

I am a pen.

I am a slave.

And freedom rests at the end of this page.

Finally on line,

Which soon will be two.

The heart of freedom beckons as the thoughts of hope brew.

Where it will end

Where I will go,

Only the holder of the Pen will know.

I will mark on and tattoo this page

Remembering from when once, I, The Pen was the slave.

Bound and shackled by a sea of white.

But now Black has become the page's hope and guiding light.

As I sail into the future, the hope rests within inked plans,

Freeing us from the white in this barren land.

I am a pen.

I Can be a Poet

By: D.L. Cid

I can be a poet – But dat shit don't pay.
I'll just work a regular 9-5
Hopefully collect my pension and wait to die.
I'll move to Sun City
Leave all my dead wife's stuff on Good Will shelf.

I can be a poet
I thought about being a mechanic – but dat shit is lame
Every day will just be the same
My life is going to be how everyone else's is
This crap they told me is eternal bliss.
I'll just work everyday
Get my retirement
Move to Sun City all by myself.

I can be a poet – but Who gonna read dis stuff.
Thinking deep ain't ever gonna be enough
Especially when TV's never collect dust.
Ever body waiting on iPods and iPhones,
Who's gonna open a book and read my poem
I guess I'll get the new thing, get an upgrade,
And do whatever it is they say they do.

I should start hustlin' – but dat shit aint safe
I could... – but man, dat aint right
I'll do my 40 hours a week
Go to movies, live for Friday nights
Collect my pension
Retire
And Wait to die
My life is whack, I should've been a Poet
Or hell, a mechanic

-Signed the Frustrated Black Youth

The Hardest Pill to Swallow (An Excerpt)

By: Samantha Clevinger

My grandparents have always lived in the same little brick house. There is a huge elm outside, and when the wind blows, it sends the swing flailing. The chains have been there so long that the bark of the limb that they wrap around has grown over and around the links, making the rusted metal a permanent fixture.

I can't walk past without thinking of my grandfather pushing me on it. Even after he was ill, and having to receive chemo, he pushed me on that swing for hours and his hearty laughter still echoes somewhere in the sunshine. Feeling invincible, feeling like there's nothing wrong in the world – that's an emotion that I wished I could grasp onto, clutch to my blue sweater as I climbed the three steps to my grandparents' front door.

"Hello darlin', it's so good to see you," my grandma greeted me as she held open the screen door. She is a small woman, at least a full head shorter than me. She looked up at me through thick, round glasses and smiled. "Let me make you a cup of tea. He's in the back room. You go ahead on and see him." I leaned down, kissed my grandma on the cheek, and smiled right back at her. However, as I walked along the hallway and get nearer to the back room that my grandfather has taken to sitting in during the day, a knot twisted in my stomach.

But, he was looking good as I walked around the corner and into the room. "Hey Grandpa!"

“Well, hello Gen-Gen.” I rolled my eyes at the name and he winked. He patted the seat of the chair caddy-corner to his and I plopped down onto the cracked leather.

“How have you been?” I asked him and my voice feels small.

“Oh, I take it day-by-day you know, but I’ve been feelin’ pretty good here lately. Doc says my counts are lookin’ good.”

“That’s good.” I said and then leaned back into my chair. My grandpa looked out the window between us. He used to be outside so much, but now, he was always in his easy chair. He pulls up the orange crochet blanket draped over him so that it is up to his collarbone, as if looking at the wind outside has given him a fresh chill.

I looked up as my grandma came in with a tray and put it on the table in front of us, a teapot steaming in its center, with two teacups on either side. “Thanks Gram, aren’t you going to sit down with us for a while?”

“I’d love to, but I have to get going to the grocery store. You two enjoy and I’ll be back in an hour or so.”

“Okay. Be safe. Love you!” I call after her as she walks down the hall.

“Love you both! No partying while I’m gone.”

“How are things with Jarod? Err—Jordan?” my grandfather asked as I poured the tea.

“Jor-rin.” I offered, raising an eyebrow.

“You know the chemo makes my brain all soggy.”

But I feel warmth rise up in my cheeks. “Things are – okay.”

“Just okay? You’re not smitten? Head-over-heels?”

“We’ve sort of hit a rough patch.” I say, “But we had a date the other night – it went well. I’m hoping things are on the mend.”

“Every relationship takes work. Your grandma and I have had many a rough patch and we’re still doin’ fine.”

“I’m just worried about him. He’s dealing with something and it’s affecting the both of us.”

“Does he make you happy?”

I open my mouth to speak, but then I pause. I think about our trips to the beach, how we dressed up together for Halloween to hand out candy, but just ended up watching Charlie Brown and eating it ourselves. I think about him leaving me roses at the bookstore and sending my grandpa funny cards to cheer him up.

“Yes.”

“Does he *really* care about you?”

I think about how Jorrin drove to my house to take care of me when I got the flu, and how when I was sad about my grandpa’s cancer, he prayed with me and hugged me and stayed up with me all night until I finally drifted to sleep.

I cleared my voice and nodded.

“Well, if those things are true, you two will find a way. People make mistakes. Especially if they are goin’ through

somethin' – I know I have.” He said, and then looked out of the window again. His blue eyes looked as if he had also drifted off to memories of other days. I sipped my tea in the silence, thinking about everything and nothing all at once.

That evening, after dinner, my grandma joked with me as we washed the dishes. She handed me a plate to dry and told me, “Now you don’t let that old man give you trouble.” as my grandpa came into the kitchen.

“What are you two hens squawking about?” he asked and winked at me as he reached up to get a tray of medicine bottles from the top of the refrigerator. His hand shook and I rushed over to help him.

“Let me.” I grabbed the tray and sat it down on the counter in front of him.

“You know” he began, as he opened the first bottle of pills, “I used to be able to pick you up with one arm and toss you over my shoulder.”

“Well, I’m a lot bigger now.”

“That, you are. You’re not my little mouse anymore. You’re a young woman.”

I poured a tall glass of water from the fridge and sat it down in front of him. “I’ll always be your little mouse.” I leaned in and whispered. He pecked me on the forehead before swallowing the first of a handful of pills.

Taken For Granted

By: Makeyvia Delee

Handprints on the window, a small smudge interlocked with a bigger one, I stare
at the moon, white light
guiding the way.

The day you were conceived our connection
began. It thrives still, though more spiritual now. I never
could forget this window, this place...we used to stand here
together. I can hear
your cry, your laugh, your tender giggles gliding down the stair
case, as you bounced to the bottom. Never
frowning always smiling. What a light
weight you were as I picked you up. Waves of our connected
energy flowing. You stood in the way
as I slid the glass door open. You always had to have it your
way

I remember stepping onto the porch, hearing
The night symphony as you watched a dragonfly land on the
tree connected
to our homemade fort. You stared
at the life around you admiring all. The light
from the overhead lamp flickered. Your eyes never
left mine as you played on the swing. I never
saw a child so beautiful. I loved the way

you raised your hands and kicked your feet up higher soaring
above as the lightening
in the distance dampened our night play. Here
we sit once again at our window farther away now near the
stairs.

A failed connection.

Your brain, its wires. If only I could have connected
your broken pieces, then you never
would have ignored the speeding car destined for your path, as
I stared,
mind catching up with body racing towards you trying to move
way
faster than humanly possible. Hearing
the car horn blaring, lights
blinking rapidly, lights
that's all I remember seeing. Feeling our connection
slowly fading. Here
I remember holding you in my arms never
Wanting to let go, always
remembering. I stare
at our place, stare, lights
off all alone thinking of a way to connect
you and I once more there, never here.

Memories

By: Makeyvia Delee

Caged within these walls,
The yearning desire to be healed
Rummaging through old letters with tattered folds.
Ravens inked on golden seals mark the time together.

Wine from lips drip slowly,
flames dance with solid barriers,
silhouette of this body, this soul,
Heat descending, reaching core.
This poison must leave at once
Eviscerated souls whisper to the wind,
“free to roam,”

Chains no longer weigh, in like feathers,
Bars dissipate, beings walk away,
As crisp colors fade to ash.

A Girl Like Me

By: Makeyvia Delee

Today was going to be a great day.

Events as follows:

1. Breakfast
2. Feed Freddy
3. Lunch with Vinny
4. Mail the Letter

Dear Mom...

My to-do list did not seem very interesting. No mind-blowing, whoa-that-was-awesome type of adventures. Just the usual. I rolled out of bed, the Sun greeted me with its cheerful happy face. At least one of us felt an emotion of some sort. Showered quickly, towel in hand I gazed at today's attire. Black, black, black, florescent pink. Bingo! I pulled the Pepto-Bismol inspired dress over my head, Today I will be noticed. Sliding into the vacant chair at the table Mother had hot oatmeal awaiting my arrival. I hated oatmeal. But, I sat through this dread every morning and slurped the concoction down. She tried, and I did not want to disappoint her. Freddy nuzzled against my bare legs meowed as I slipped him my leftovers by the spoonful.

Two loud honks from outside let me know Vinny was here and ready to go. We had a lunch date and I wanted it to be extra sweet so I suggested we go to a small, secluded, Romantic café around the block. Vin slowly walked towards me meeting me halfway down the steps stopping right in front of Moms rose garden. Vin smiled, grabbed me by the hand and pulled me into my favorite spot. I listened to Vin's heartbeat. It mirrored mine right down to the second. We were connected like that. Vin brushed a few strands of hair from my face, and kissed my forehead. Absence always makes the heart grow fonder. I loved Vin and Vin loved me nothing could ever change that.

Mom stepped out on the porch as Vin and I were getting into the car. I saw her tightened emotionless face cringe just a

tad bit as Vin kissed me once more before driving away. She never liked Vin. Vin was good to me so I did not understand what made Mom so angry.

Walking into the café several sideways glances were thrown our way. Snide remarks and snickers floated through the air. Vin never let go of my hand, held it tighter. Even in such an awkward surrounding I felt safe, secure, Vin always had that effect on me. We found a booth in the far back tucked away in the corner. It had this cute little vintage drape above the table which made our date that much more Perfect. It gave us privacy for once. I ordered a chicken salad; Vin ordered a cheese burger and fries. As we waited for our orders I stared at Vin. Wondering how Vin was always so cool and calm about our situation. Vin never gave the vibe of being scared or insecure. Just down to earth care free Vin. We ate, we laughed this was what we needed. A moment of peace to ourselves.

On the way home I asked Vin to stop by the post office. I needed to mail The Letter. I pulled the tattered and worn envelope from my purse and slipped it into the box.

Two weeks later Ms. Essence opened her door to two police officers. Her daughter had been missing for quite some time now and she hoped they came bearing great news. The first officer lowered his head held his hand on his chest straining the words to come out.

“Ms.Essence your daughter Nadia Hope was found dead this morning out by the beach where her body washed ashore along with the body of Vanessa Cree, Ma’am I am so sorry for your loss”,

Ms Essence stood motionless between the door. She opened her mouth but no words could form. She rocked back and forth, back and forth. Both officers stood anxiously by her side. They did not know what to do but, be there, be supportive. Minutes seemed like hours before Ms. Essence pulled herself together. Before walking back inside, the second officer handed her a letter. No return sender address was labeled. Contrary to her better judgment Ms. Essence opened the letter.

It Read...

Dear Mom,

Life was too much to handle I couldn't take it anymore. The stares, the whispers, the judgment. Through it all I thought my mother would be there to back me up. I never wanted to disappoint you. Take care of Freddy, will you?

Love Always,
Nadia Hope Essence

When I hurt Vinny hurts. Where I go Vinny goes. We're connected like that.

One Heart. One Love .One Soul

Sugar, Sugar (Part 1)

By: Sarah Doty

She danced. This untouchable girl of beauty and sweetness and innocence. She danced freely and did splits in the air that sealed the deal for every teenage dirt bag that came her way. What made her even more infuriating was her mind. She danced day and night with her lean body and long thick black hair, but her mind—oh, that mind—it was pure genius. That 4.0 lit up like a neon bar sign above her head. She danced. Unlike the less conventional girl who resorted to full blown madness at a smack on the ass by some douchebag, this girl—with her signature splits in the air simply kicked those slap happy boys straight in the dome, and damnit she did it gracefully.

Red knew this girl would make it out alive. She was too good not to. Apricot used to be an exotic dancer, and even though she spent most of her time shooting up, she was too smart and beautiful to live that way forever. Red was a different kind of mess. She had no hope for herself.

Red sat slumped down in a chair closest to the door. Her turn to talk was coming up, and she didn't know what to say. She figured she was supposed to spill what she did to fuck up so bad to land herself in rehab. She thought about her first week there, writhing and sweating and screaming in complete

darkness. That damn Clonidine patch didn't do shit, so they loaded her up on a bunch of pills she didn't recognize and came in to take her blood pressure every half hour for five days. She barely made it to this bullshit A.M. meeting and already missed the group meeting at six. She didn't feel like finding a feeling word to match the fucked up look on her face, and her goal for the day was to slip into a coma and just die right there.

When the person to her right finished glorifying her stay in rehab, talking about how much clearer her mind was and how her whole outlook on life had changed so much and she was so happy to be alive and some other such nonsense, everyone's attention turned to Red. She hazily looked around, still half knocked out by the pills they gave her, and tried as quickly as she could to remember all that had happened to bring her to that coffee stained chair in that small room full of a bunch of haggard looking addicts and alcoholics. Minus Apricot of course. Bitch.

The day Red left Albuquerque she drove toward Route 66 in Arizona. She left her mother's fourth husband with a broken nose sleeping on the ground next to his creepy black Lincoln. She'd finally had enough. She grabbed the keys from his pocket, slung her bag into the backseat and peeled the hell

out of there. Mel Gibson's "FREEDOM!!!!" boomed in her head, and she almost thought about laughing, but she was too drunk to really appreciate the irony. She drove for what felt like forever, but that could've been because she was so hammered. Once she made it to Kingman, Red realized she'd run out of money and was completely screwed. She started swearing out the window as the Lincoln sputtered its last breaths and people honked as they swerved past her. "Fuck it. I'll walk," and Red grabbed her bag from the back and slid out of the car. Leaving the keys in the ignition and still slowly rolling forward, she walked away from the car without a second glance. Her hands were stained red from the fight with her step dad, and she headed out with her bloody thumb in the air determined to either hitch a ride to Vegas or find some sleezy guy to ride with that would take her far away from New Mexico. That's when Kine came along. He'd been stopped at a Jack in the Box off Route 66 and watched Red ditch her car. He was intrigued at her boldness, but as he was paying for his food she slipped behind a pawn shop and he had to keep driving. Red tried to get her last fix, but there was hardly enough to make her eyes water. Kine had just gotten ahead of her on the road when she ducked her head out to check for pigs before emerging from behind the building. His obnoxious diesel truck blew out black smoke at her, and in a fit of rage and withdrawal she picked up a rock and flung it at his tailgate. He stopped abruptly, jumped

out of the driver seat and yelled “are you fucking crazy? You’re walking down the street alone like an ass with your thumb in the air and decide to provoke some random person? What the hell is wrong with you?”

Red just stood there. Standing in front of Kine brought Red one of those moments where she felt like she knew him; he made her feel calm even though he thought she was a nutcase. She then blurted out “I need to get to Vegas. I don’t have any money for gas, and I’m not very good company, but I need a ride.” Kine looked at her curiously, and without thinking it through said “okay, come on. Hop in the truck.”

The drive from Kingman to Vegas only took two hours, but in that time Red and Kine found that they enjoyed each other’s company. He didn’t know who she was, so Red tried her best to act normal despite the increasing shaking in her hands and the tightening in her chest. They laughed and listened to music, and for a moment Red felt the simplicity of life. She saw a small shred of hope for another way of living, but the twinge traveling the length of her body shut it out, and she knew the contentment wouldn’t last.

The closer they got to Vegas the more anxious she was to part ways. She asked him to take her to the New York New York (she had always wanted to ride the rollercoaster there) and once inside the casino she ditched him and that was the end of it. In the midst of withdrawal she remembered a line by

Emily Dickenson that “narcotics cannot still the tooth that nibbles at the soul.” She needed a fix, even if it didn’t do shit to lift her soul, and she needed it right then.

It’s easy to score when you know where to look. Red sat at a slot machine for a while cringing and anxiously looking around. There were so many lights, so many people, so many sounds. “You’re in Vegas, remember?” she reminded herself. Unfortunately, leaving her step-father behind meant also leaving her supplier behind. The New York New York was too nice a hotel for what she needed, so she headed outside and began walking down Las Vegas Boulevard headed for tweaker town.

Fremont Street was in an older area of Vegas. The last time Red had been there she was seven and with her mom and grandma. Even at seven, Red was able to grasp that this was a place you only visit—not somewhere to spend much time. Being there shot her back to those years where she actually wanted to live. Those years where things were good and innocent and true. Who knew she’d be willing to taint those memories so many years later.

They’d put on light shows outside that were a must see for tourists and the perfect climax for every junkie’s trip. Red

remembered seeing The Four Queens on the corner of the street all those years before, so she headed in that direction. Tourists started to thin out as the night went on, leaving the playground to the locals.

Red eventually made her way to the corner of the casino entrance and looked up. Sure enough it was just as she remembered. The gold crown stood above her and the sounds of bells and coins called to her from inside. She turned around to scope out the area for the best place to buy, and she found groups of guys hanging around every flashing corner, girls slung around their necks too fucked up to realize what was going on, too much make up on and too little clothes. These weren't typically the kinds of people she'd buy from, but she was desperate and just didn't give a shit about being whored out all night for a half gram.

Her step dad taught her well. She walked up to a small group of guys, smile on her face, black bra strap easily visible under her tight orange tank top, and of course she immediately got their attention. That wasn't enough though. To prove she'd hold up her end of the unspoken bargain, she had to show them what she was willing to do for just one fix.

She sat alone in silence, drapes drawn shut, pen in hand, rolled up dollar bill in the other. She never did have the courage to shoot up, and smoking the shit just tasted too bad. Cars passed. Noises were drowned out as she found herself gripping onto the teasing thoughts dragging her to Hell. They whispered in her ear as she leaned into the air trying to make out what they were saying. She screamed back at them. She screamed at herself. She saw him pass by the window.

“Wait, who was that? How’d he find me? Is it him? How’d Scott find me? What’s he saying? Scott!”

No one was there.

Suddenly Red was thrown back to Lane’s house on Fairview Drive. She was on the floor incomprehensibly writing down the voices. She heard Eminem rapping to her, and she wrote it down. She wrote everything she heard, but she didn’t know what she was writing. First it was poetry, then it was about Lane. For split seconds off and on she met lucid thoughts. They were quickly eliminated as she realized someone else had taken over. It wasn’t her writing anymore.

“Who the hell’s in my head? I’ve lost her. Who’s thinking right now? Is it me? Am I really Red? Why’s Scott outside?”

Sitting by the window scared her. She moved to the safest place she knew—Lane’s bed. Every car that passed was that one without a muffler. The one Scott was driving. The one

she heard as she slept no matter how far away he actually was. He was always in her mind. She was always in his mind. She hated him. She used to love him, but that didn't matter anymore. Benny was looking at her.

“What are you looking at, you stupid dog!”

She turned the stuffed animal face down on the bed, and the voices trickled away. Then they came back. All they whispered was her name. She thought she called Lane—she even held her phone to her ear and began speaking. She wasn't speaking to anyone but herself. When she pulled the phone away it was blank. There were no outgoing or incoming calls.

“I heard Lane. She was talking to me. Was it me she was talking to? Does she know I'm Red? Why is my outgoing call missing? I was just on the phone with her.”

A knock on the door brought her back to her hotel room in Vegas. She heard Scott talking, but when she opened the door it wasn't him. Instead, R. W. Drake stood before her.

Red's heart dropped down hard in her chest and she felt a rush through her entire body even more intense than the lines she'd just done. Drake shoved her back through the door and slammed it shut. He was fuming with rage, and as he slowly moved toward her he whispered “I've got eyes

everywhere, Red. You owe me.” She stumbled backward and scrambled to move past him, but he grabbed her shoulder and dug his thumb down hard on her collarbone. He hit her in the face until her lip bled and knocked her onto the bed. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a needle full to the top with the liquid he knew would get him what he wanted. He had to score too, and Red was going to give it to him.

As Drake clambered on top of her he finally got his legs straddled around her hips and dug the needle into her left arm. Red struggled and got in a few punches before her mind took her away from the disgusting man on top of her, ripping her orange tank top and whipping what looked like a turkey’s neck out and shoving it into her.

Her mind took her back to elementary school. She was sitting in the cafeteria in a blue and white dress and Drake was sitting next to her. He had a clean cut brown goatee and slicked back hair, nothing like his pepper facial hair she felt on her exposed chest. He wore a button up striped collar shirt and smiled for a picture.

Christmases and birthdays passed by as if they existed in some other dimension. He gave her a set of binoculars for Christmas and took her camping and bike riding and jet skiing. He rarely came into town after her parent’s divorce, but when he did he gave Red the escape she needed. He took her away from her sick grandmother and neurotic mother and perverted

uncle. When she got older things started to get weird between them. She knew in the back of her mind that he had the wrong kind of feelings for her, but she also knew that he had access to whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted, and when she ran out of options back home, she flew to Albuquerque and stayed there for the next two years.

Red didn't know how much time had passed, but as she began to wake up the drapes were open and the coffee pot was bubbling. The TV blared the morning news. *"Mexican copy cat gang claiming to be from the bay area caught raping young girl. All members locals from Vegas area."* Red looked around the room as it was tipping back and forth and finally locked in on Drake sitting at the round table next to the bed. He was drinking out of a styrofoam cup and eating McDonald's. Red just stared at him, still unable to move, and as Drake shook his head at the newscast he absentmindedly said "you want a mcmuffin? I got an extra for you." Red shook her head no, and when Drake finally looked over at her he just smiled. He got up from the table and sat on the edge of the bed. He leaned in and Red felt his chapped lips run along side her neck and felt him breathe in the smell of her skin. He whispered in her ear "you

were better than your mother, you little slut.” Red just laid her head back down and passed out.

When Red finally woke up again she heard the sounds of a radio dispatcher and saw red and blue lights flashing on the other side of her eyelids. She groggily opened her eyes and saw Drake standing by the bed talking to a pig telling him “I just don’t know what happened. She’s my stepdaughter and when she ran away I got so worried. I jumped on the first flight from New Mexico and found her here. This is a place she used to come to smoke drugs or whatever kids nowadays are doing. I think this must be a cry for help.” Paramedics came in flashing little lights in her eyes and sticking her with needles that pumped cool liquid into her veins. They moved her onto a stretcher and tied her down in the ambulance. “What’s your name, honey? Do you know where you are?” As the ambulance gained speed toward the hospital, Red began to realize what had happened, and for the first time since she tasted the sweet lips of Heaven, she cried and she kept crying until she finally woke up that Saturday morning and shuffled along to that bullshit A.M. therapy session.

It’s easy to score when you know where to look. This time there was just an obstacle in Red’s way to that fix, so she

spent the next 30 days going to bull shit meetings and slowly progressing her feeling words from “severely depressed” to “optimistic.” She smiled in group therapy, brushed her hair, borrowed books from the therapists and reported back to the group what insight she had gained. She repeated every night that she was just “taking it one day at a time,” and the nurses and shrinks loved her and felt confident in her sobriety, so when the day came that Red was finally able to embrace life outside of the locked doors of rehab, she hugged everyone goodbye, smiled, and walked away.

The problem with coming out of rehab in Vegas is that all you have to do is turn the corner and you’ll find a bar or a strip club and plenty of places to buy. People probably wait around those corners on purpose, looking to catch some weak and brainwashed mind fresh from the confines of sterilized walls and serenity prayers. Red walked along the sidewalk for a while making her way toward Fremont Street. She found herself back in front of The Four Queens, staring up at the gold crown while the sound of bells and coins enticed her from inside. She managed a faint smile as she remembered her trip there as a young girl, and for a moment she considered the life she could have away from this spot on Fremont Street. Her smile faded and as she turned away from the entrance to the casino a man was standing behind her. He looked directly in her eyes and said “looks like you need some sugar. Why don’t

you come along with me and we can both score a little?" Red looked up into Drake's eyes as he wrapped his arm around her waist and led her away. He pushed his body against hers as he opened the door to the hotel room. As he shoved her inside and shut the door he pushed her toward the bed. His pepper stained goatee tickled the same spot on her neck as he handed her a needle. She felt as though she were going to ralph all over the bastard, but instead she hungrily took the needle, slipped the belt off Drake's pants, tied it around her bicep, and shot the liquid straight into the fat vein in her right arm.

A Day on James Island

By: Manny Floresca

Charlene sat solemnly on the dock next to Patty and Maybeth as they dipped their toes in the warm James Island water. They started swaying and humming to an old hymn their mothers taught them. Charlene continued humming, admiring the ripples in the water as it twirled around her black feet. She became lost in a trance, stuck, remembering earlier this morning when four white boys came driving through her neighborhood throwing rocks and coke bottles at her. She remembered calling for her husband, Jimmy, to come out of the house, but he was passed out in the hammock, too drunk to realize that she was being harassed.

The women were calm, lost in their own thoughts when the voice of a white man brought them quickly to their feet. On getting up, Charlene tripped over her long skirt and knocked over two buckets full of crabs. Then, Charlene heard her husband, Jimmy, yelling drunkenly at the white man. Charlene saw Jimmy and knew he had come looking for her to see about supper when he crossed with a white farmer.

“Cum nah, hep me offa dem crabs to da whyt man en pray he don kill mah fool husbin. Cum nah,” she whispered frantically to Patty and Maybeth. The women rushed to scoop the crabs back into the bucket when the voices of the two men grew louder.

“Get outta here, you drunken monkey, ya no good fur nothin’ nigger! Scat outta here fore’ I cut ya da pieces,” Charlene heard the white man say. She could feel the sweat break through her ebony skin as she began to pray that nothing would get out of hand.

“You ain’t mah mastah,” Jimmy said smiling drunkenly.

Charlene stood and shouted to the white man. “How bout some crabs, mistah,” her voice shook nervously. Just as she reached the end of the dock, the white man thrust his pocket knife towards Jimmy’s throat. Jimmy dodged the knife, spun around, smashed his whiskey bottle against a tree and lifted it towards the white man who was already in mid-attack. The farmer ran right into Jimmy’s broken glass bottle, piercing his own face. It happened so fast. Blood poured down his chin and neck. Charlene heard Maybeth begin to scream. Patty clutched her tightly as she fell to her knees. Charlene held her breath as she watched her husband twist and plunge his glass bottle deeper into the white man’s unrecognizable face. She could do nothing except replay the prayer she had whispered as she was just running down the dock to save her husband. That was all over in the matter of seconds. Her husband lived and she was thankful, but prayer wasn’t going to save her and Jimmy from what just happened nor the consequences that were going to come.

Easter

By: Manny Floresca

It's been four years since Dustin pulled the trigger, placing that bullet perfectly between his gray blue eyes. His friends were mortified by the poor make-up job done by the funeral home. Lumpy wax caked in place of his once beautiful face, making him look much older than the vibrant, insane, seventeen year old that he was. I wasn't invited to his funeral, but I should've crashed it anyways. That's what he would've done, if it were me and it would've helped him believe that I was really gone. Instead, he's vanished and my mind tricks itself into seeing him in the strangers that pass through my life. I see him in the rejects that smoke cigarettes, wear all black and sit mysteriously on the street corner outside my apartment window. I see him in my roommate's little brother, banging his head away to the punk music blaring on his ipod. I see him in the boy in my creative writing class, who's shaved his head on only one side. Dustin would've done that. I see him especially on days like this, where life has led me straight back down memory lane.

"You ready to go?"

I look up at my roommate, Tessa, beaming happily like a teenage girl.

"What are you wearing?" She asks standing in my bedroom doorway, her smile fading into disgust.

"Jeans and a shirt."

"You're wearing a pink polo."

"Yeah, so?"

"You can't wear that to a skateboarding competition, Audree! And look at your hair."

"What's wrong with my hair?" I say twirling a long brown strand around my finger.

“You curled it. We’re not going to a Barbie luncheon. You can’t meet Skully looking like that, he’ll piss his pants laughing,” she says, plopping onto my bed.

“Skully?”

“It’s his skater name,” she says proudly.

“It’s ridiculous.”

“It’s hot.”

“And what about what you’re wearing,” I ask plucking at her black blouse and disheveled dirty blonde hair.

“Skateboarders like girls who look rough,” she says seductively, puckering her lips at me teasingly.

“Hey,” she says, suddenly scanning over my face.

“What?”

“You have a cut above your eye.” She reaches near my forehead and presses a finger to it.

“I must’ve scratched myself in my sleep,” I say, pulling away.

“Still not ready to tell me what’s up?” Tessa’s green eyes look at me sincerely. “We’ve only been roommates for over a year now,” she offers lightly. I know that Tessa means well, but she could never understand my relationship with Dustin, how much his death has affected me, or who I’ve become since he’s been gone.

“Is there anything I can do?” She asks, tucking a ringlet behind my ear.

“Yeah,” I say solemnly.

“What?” She says, studying my face some more, expecting all of it to fall from my lips.

“You can get the hell off my bed and take me to this damn skate park.”

A smile spreads over Tessa’s face, before she takes me by the hand and leads me out of our apartment. Like two young girls, we skip down the stairwell and race one another across

our college campus to where the crowd has hovered around the skate park.

As we approach, I can't help but to feel as if we've stepped into another world. Colorful vans and buses with spray-painted energy drink logos surround the area. The DJ calls out to the crowd on the mic, and throws his hand up to the beat of the blaring music. The crowd is tight and full. Mosh pits form with bundles of freaks, emos and goths. Girls with half shaved heads and rainbow colored Mohawks walk around me casually. Tessa was right about me standing out in my baby pink polo and carefully curled hair. It's Barbie versus vampires out here.

"I've never seen anything like this," I yell to Tess over the screaming music. We push through the crowd together until we reach the fence that blocks us off from the skaters who occupy the ramps. I watch in awe as the long haired skaters fly past each other, skating from one side of the ramp to the other, flipping their boards in the air.

"I'm going to go find Skully," Tessa yells. "Stay here."

"Tess, don't leave me! I don't know these people." I say, taking her hand.

"Neither do I," she says laughing and shrugging. "Don't be so uptight. Mingle. You'll be fine." She shoots a reassuring smile. "I'll be right back. I want you to meet him, okay?"

"Okay," I say unsure, watching her disappear into the tight crowd. I look around at all the different faces, faces my parents would never approve of. I start to wonder how they're doing, if they're getting along, if their reputations remain well established in town despite their divorce. Sometimes, I miss them, yearn to call my mom and talk with her for hours. I know

I can't do that, though. When I remind myself of just how self-concerned they are, I can't believe that we're related. The one call a month is already more than they deserve.

After Dustin died, I could never find a way to cope. My parents could never guess that their daughter knew the boy whose death was put in the papers for shooting himself. No one could guess that. Dustin and I were two different people who came from different types of society. We weren't supposed to know each other, much less speak or get to know one another. And as far as the world knows, we didn't. When he died there was no one to turn to, no one who would understand, who wouldn't point fingers and say that I was simply claiming to know him because he was dead. So, I had to finish high school as if none of it affected me, as if I didn't even notice the high school skater had died, when the truth was I did. Every day I was reminded and faking a smile through it all became unbearable.

I made myself sick. I ate less and whatever I did eat, I chucked up. Sleeping wasn't an option when every time I closed my eyes I saw his face and heard his voice begging me to let him in, to let the world know our secret. I found a way to make the voice and images go away. All I had to do was to sneak into the bathroom and slip in a few of my mom's old prescription pills. I worried about what would happen when I ran out and couldn't refill, but I didn't think about that until later.

Everything was fine up until the night I had a seizure. I woke up around one am, tiptoed into the bathroom, popped in two pills and dozed off. When I woke back up, it was 4 am and I forgot that I already took two pills, so I took a few more. I was on my way back to my bedroom when I felt like something was

wrong. I remember my stomach feeling tight. My mouth started to fill with warm, salty liquid and it seemed that no matter how much I swallowed, I couldn't get it to go away. I called out for my mom as I crouched down to the floor, fighting the tension in my joints and muscles, catching the white foam in my palm before I turned over into the fetal position and gave in.

When I woke up, I expected to open my eyes to a white room and a smiling nurse. I was surprised to wake up in my own bed, alone. I sat up, listening to my parents in the kitchen, discussing why they couldn't risk taking me to the hospital. They were afraid that their friends and bosses would find out that their daughter tried to commit suicide by overdosing on her mom's anxiety prescription. Even though that wasn't quite the case, that's what the newspapers would say and my parents refused to be a part of it. So, they took the risk, practically crossing their fingers in hopes that the meds would even out and I would pull through just fine. Thankfully, I did but something was stirred in me that day. I was taught growing up that the opinions of my peers were of great importance, that the way I carried and presented myself said something about who I was and could decide how my future would unravel. I didn't believe in that anymore.

I sobered up long enough to get the hell out of town, snatching a hundred dollar bill out of my dad's wallet, a few clothes, and a crumbled up note that Dustin left in my locker the day before he died. I spent a few nights on a bus station and a lot of time on a train before I made it to Charleston. That's where I found Tessa, strumming a guitar on a park bench with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth. She was so beautiful. I remember thinking that if I were back at home I wouldn't dare speak to her. That was the first thing I did in the start of my new life. I wasn't quite ready to tell her what I had been

through just yet, but I got the feeling that I didn't need to. She invited me to move into her apartment and got me a job at a coffee shop in walking distance. A few months ago, she encouraged me to enroll in college with her and even helped me pay some of the tuition. She became my only family and friend, the one person besides Dustin that I came to love more than myself. I was transforming out of the person I was taught to be and into the person I wanted to be. I no longer had to bite my tongue, keep secrets or be afraid of what people thought. Yet, all of it didn't seem to matter because Dustin was still dead and my chance to let him in had come and gone.

I look back at the skaters on the ramps and can't help thinking that this is where he'd be, leaning against the fence with his board in one hand and the other in his pocket, waiting for his turn to ride. The humming of the skateboard wheels running along the ramps and cement make my stomach turn with haunting memories. I search for Dustin in the crowd as I always do, rummaging through the different faces until I find one that fits. Some time goes by before I find him soaring through the air, flipping, and turning his board before landing back on the ramp and coasting to the other side. I gaze at his greasy, shoulder length hair floating behind him. He stops and kicks his board up, catching it with one hand. He turns quickly, glancing, stopping when his blue eyes catch mine. I smile and look away, embarrassed that the skating stranger caught me staring. Looking down, I know that Dustin has disappeared by now. My imagination can never keep his presence for long. I know that if I take a second glance, the truth will sink in. Dustin's face will fade out and the true features of a skating stranger will replace him. I take a deep breath and look up again, only to find that Dustin is still glaring at me. I blink a few times but he remains wide-eyed, shocked and alert. His face

turns pale, as if he's looking at a ghost. I continue waiting for his face to disintegrate, expecting someone else's face to correct this illusion, but Dustin's face is so unmoving. My stomach curls into knots. I clench my fists together, feeling the clamminess beginning to form in the lines of my palms. Pressure forms in my head and chest. Panic is overwhelming me.

I begin to make my way towards him, slowly slipping through the crowd that stands between us. Our eyes are set, refusing to look anywhere else but at one another. I bump shoulders with a few boys with heavy make-up and place my hand on some girl's shoulder with dreadlocks, moving her out of my way. I come out of the sea of people, just feet away from him now. The world falls silent and the only thing I can hear is the humming of skateboard blades running over smooth pavement. Precious, intimate, forbidden memories trigger a sore sensation deep in the back of my throat. I keep my eyes steady on Dustin, afraid that if I look away for even a second he'll disappear. I scan over him, reregistering every physical feature I could never forget. I look down to his left wrist and find a trail of white scars marked where his veins sit. I've gone crazy. Either I've gone crazy or I took too many pills again last night and this is all a dream. Or maybe I'm dead. This could all be a trick, some kind of cruel design. But I know that nothing could recreate those gray blue eyes in this moment, or fake the way they're looking at me right now, weak, passionate and scared. His body looks solid, dimensional, touchable, alive. Some time has passed and neither of us speaks a word.

My brows press together, trying to process the mixed emotions and the chaos between what I know to be true and what's right in front of me. I tell myself that this can't be real, that I've gone too far this time, that I only *want* it to be real. I

begin to back away from this Dustin-looking stranger, from whatever this is. He squints at me as if to ask if I'm seriously thinking about walking away. I catch a fleck of fire in his eyes before he slightly lifts the left corner of his mouth into that smirk I know so well and I realize. The stranger standing in front of me is no stranger at all. My breathing becomes heavy. My eyes widen with horror and disbelief and joy and pain. His face softens as he watches the emotions play on my face. He steps towards me and the familiar smell of sweat and cigarettes hit me, creating a reality I never thought possible. Dustin's alive. When he reaches me he puts his lips to my ear. Watching his long hair shadow in around his face as he leans into me takes me back to the day we met. "Don't scream," he whispers. I whimper at the sound of his voice. Tears begin to form and stream down my cheeks. I clamp a hand over my mouth to keep it all under control.

Tessa comes out of the crowd behind Dustin, smiling, heading towards us. I back away, wiping the tears from my face, hiding any sign of familiarity. It's a habit. Dustin's mouth hangs slightly open, his brows press together, confused and disappointed. It's the same look he used to give when I ignored him in front of my friends. There's no time to tell him that it's not like that anymore. Tessa approaches. One look at my face and she can tell that I've been crying, despite my attempt at a cover up.

"Oh my god. What did you do to her?" She says taking me by the shoulders. "Are you okay?" I nod in reply. Dustin looks at Tessa, then to me. His silence makes her spin around.

"Skully, what did you do?!" She says shoving into his chest. Dustin shrugs his shoulders, looking stunned and confused. His response makes the burning in my throat

unbelievably sharp. Clamping my hand over my mouth doesn't help. Tessa pulls me into her.

"Hey it's okay," she soothes. "I know he's kind of scary but he's nice. I promise. Don't cry." She looks to Dustin, "She's not really used to the scene. She's probably just overwhelmed and I left her alone with all of these maniacs while I went looking for you."

"I just need a minute," I say pulling away from Tessa.

"Okay," She says hesitantly. I step away and take a minute to breathe, feeling Dustin's eyes all over me. I look at him, studying me, shocked as much as I am. My eyes trail over his forehead, where the papers said he shot himself. Smooth and flawless. How can any of this be happening? Dustin chews on his bottom lip, as a glisten begins to form in his eye but doesn't quite surface. Tessa places her hand on his shoulder and rises on her tip toes to whisper in his ear. He leans his head down towards her, placing a hand on her hip so that she doesn't lose her balance. Nausea overwhelms me. *Dustin is alive. Dustin is Skully. Dustin is dating Tessa. Tessa is my best friend. Dustin's alive.* I take a deep breath before walking back over.

Tessa smiles at me sincerely. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

She pulls Dustin closer by the arm, smiling like a little girl. "I want you to meet Skully. Audree, this is my boyfriend, Skully. Skully, meet Audree, my roommate." Tessa smiles, looking back and forth between us. I can't move or speak. I wait for Dustin to explain himself, to tell the story of how he

faked his own death and why he did it, to tell Tessa what this is all about, why I was crying when she approached.

“Audree,” Dustin acknowledges, offering his hand for me to take. I search his face in disbelief. Dustin drops his face to the ground, swallowing hard. I look at Tessa, smiling and leaning her head against his arm, happily. I think about all she’s done for me, how she took me in and helped me adjust to the city life. Dustin’s jaw flexes. His eyes are low to the ground, waiting for it. I open my mouth to confess, and then hesitate.

“Skully.”

Dustin looks up. I take his hand, holding it firmly, just like I did the day he taught me how to skate so many years ago, in some secret life.

“It’s good to finally meet you.”

Kumbaya

By: Tarrin Freeman

Sweet grass and sweet tea

may seem sweet to you,

but normal to me.

As red bugs wait

In the swaying Spanish moss,

the salty smell of the air fills their lungs,

as well as mine.

“Yes ma’am” and “no sir”

are not foreign words,

but merely a reminder that

the mindsets are different where I live at.

The water is salt

and my people are sugar,

the main ingredients in southern hospitality.

The sea island heat

melts the ice in my tea

as I hear the organic music

flow from our tongue.

I taste

hear

smell

smile

proudly, as a Bin Yah.

2013/1/17

By: David Goff

I tried to smile again today. But
these lips won't let me. Can I even call these lips?
My mouth won't speak words that
others
can understand. Or that they seem to.
They never talk back,
only to. One-sided conversations
I can never complete.

And it's like nobody expects me to.
They don't want me to talk back. They just want
to be listened to. They want
their voices to be heard.
By Anyone.

Every day I listen.
Every day I remain silent.
Every day I wonder
why.

Then sometimes,
When I think about it enough, I realise.
Maybe I'm here to listen.
To absorb, to wick away their pain.

Maybe, that's why
I am here:
to be the one who listens.

Sonnet 17

By: David Goff

Sometimes I think about my place in life.

What meaning do I bring to this wide earth
that birthed me and continues to sustain
this more than often fragile soul in me?

My days too often only lead to strife,
my nights filled with the questioning of worth;
is living really worth this stress and pain,
vague promises of "paradise" to be?

I think and think and then I realise
that life is not about the goals and tries;
it's not about a medal at the end
but rather more about what you find within.

I close my eyes and step into the sun
that comforts me with warmth and whispered truth.

Excerpt from UGPA (Working Title)

By: David Goff

Cool night air flooded in through the open moonroof as we sped down the road, the view outside the window blurring into itself, the music blasting. We couldn't hear anything but it around us, not even each other's shouts that escaped into the streets. I felt a chill, I'd long since lost my heat to the thin winter wind. I pushed my hands into the pockets of my jacket, gripping the inner fabric in a failing attempt to regain full feeling in my hands. My mind wandering, unable to think straight because of the slip, I looked over to the driver's seat and watched him: just watched. I took in every detail of his face, his expression. The way his eyes shone with each passing streetlight, the way his brow shifted as he replicated the fluctuating pitches of the lyrics as his mouth wrapped around the words he sang. I became consumed in thoughts of his lips wet, his head tilted back, his mouth halfway open in exaltation, his warm fingertips trailing my skin.

The music seemed to fade then, and I was left with nothing but myself and him. We sat together, not speaking, but not needing to. We shared the time through the song, the pulse beating through us both at the same time. We were united by sound. I stared for several minutes unbroken, unconscious of myself or the others in the backseat or where we were going. I didn't care: nothing else was as important as learning him in that moment.

He turned his head to me, and for a second it looked slowed, lagging behind real time while I was entranced. His eyes cast on me, their silvery glow meeting mine. Just then, time stopped completely. Nothing moved. I heard no sound, felt no cold. The only thing I knew was that he saw me. He felt me just as I'd felt him. We were one.

I could feel the bass gradually fade in, pumping at a constant rhythm I'd forgotten for those moments, and the world resumed its previous pace, his eyes blinking as he turned back to face the road. After that, I turned to the window and watched the city fly past me.

Summer Night

By: David Goff

Our clothes stick to our
backs, to our
legs
from the sweat that seeps out
of our sweet-smelling skin.
Windows open, allowing
warm breeze to flow through the room.
It's dark, and quiet except for the crickets
in the background.
Soft white noise to our unstimulated ears
blocks out memories of days past and hopes
for the future.
It's on nights like these, when the currents of
warm and cool air dance past us and the humidity
makes everything fuzzy,
that we exist now. Together.

In the moment, nowhere else but alive.

Sheet

By: David Goff

I was on my way home,
driving across a bridge
over the river.

The tide was high, the
water almost
reaching the land.

The moon was out in its
yellow full glory, casting
a veiled sheen on the
water's surface.

Fog enveloped the space,
it seemed as if there was
nothing
other than what was just
around me.

Together, all of
this, really created a sense of
oneness.

I was the water, the fog, the
thin pale glow on the river.
Everything was the same,
the world was compressed into a
thick sheet.
Everything together,
all one.

At that moment, I was
open.
I saw everything, knew everything.
Because I was everything.

I took the sheet home with me,
back home,
where everything seemed
apart.
Everything was in compartments before.

Now, I can use the sheet
I saved from that night.
When I'm feeling split, when
everything feels separate,
I use it.
And it reminds me:
Everything is whole.
Everything together.

2013/1/9

By: David Goff

That's something I don't think I'll ever understand– the fact that some people don't see that everything is everything. Everything exists– past, present, and future. Everything is one thing, the universe is the universe, and everything in it is the universe. Nothing makes anything up, there aren't real categories of things, there are no differences between things. You are an ant and that ant is Jupiter and Jupiter is a diamond and a diamond is a virion. Everything is. Even nothing is. There does not exist a thing which is not. It's only when we begin to pick our world apart, when we start saying this is that, and that is not this, that problems arise. That's the stuff that causes confusion and hate in life.

The Obedient Son

By: Victoria Hilton

We buried Hatchet today out behind the last fence post next to the house. I always thought that was a dumb name for a dog, but Robert got to name 'im on accounta he was the oldest. There were four of us. There was Robert, then me, then Lily, then James. Lily and Robert cried a lot when Hatchet lost 'is marbles. Pa figures a coon got to 'im and made 'im mad. I didn't care too much about it, and James was too little to know what all the fuss was about. But Robert was really a square that day. He couldn't even shoot 'is own dog! He cried and cried and begged Pa not to make 'im do it. Pa was tough. He told 'im to be a man and to take care of 'is responsibilities. I got tired of listening to all the cryin', so I took Pa's gun and shot the dog. And then, then we buried 'im.

Robert changed after I shot Hatchet. He acted like a little girl most days. Lily was upset, too, but she was a little girl, so it was okay for 'er. But Robert really let Pa down. He was supposed to be learnin' 'ow to be a man, but all 'e wanted to do

was cry about 'is dead dog. I told Pa I'd be the good son, the son
who wouldn't cry for a week over a dumb, dead dog. I did the
right thing. I put the mutt outta 'is misery.

We buried Robert today.

Celibacy

By: Victoria Hilton

Trouble spelled out in three letters:

M
E
N

-you, sirs, will be the death of me.

This one's cute, that one's rich, the other one has a yacht
but his friend's is bigger

-that is, indeed, what she said.

What to do? What to do? What to do?
The who is irrelevant
if the reason is right

but the wrong tastes so much sweeter done in secrecy.

Oh well, now's not the time to settle anyway
unless he's perfect

-but I'll have to meet his friends
first.

Waiting for a Soldier

By: Victoria Hilton

Trace the trail of tears across your freckles,
as mine flow slowly down to match
-no one makes a sound.

Cup my face to yours and leave me
with a chaste kiss on my lips;
don't let me go.

Your plane is leaving
but I'm not going
and you might not come back.

Brush your finger gently
down my nose to
close my eyes.

Away you go, rucksack on shoulder,
boots laced tightly,
tags jingling with every step.

Through tears I see you turn
to look at me to say:
"I'll see you soon."

And now I wait for your return.

Untitled

By: Nicole Kustak

In time, we turn boldly against the grain.
They said we'd never amount to much more
than closing up shop and cleaning the floors.
No hope within sight, nothing more to gain.

We fought to defeat the simple thought
that time would swallow us, coddle and baby
us; fearing that strength is but a "maybe."
After years of defeat, we know that naught.

Though time is fickle, it is to be seen
that it is shifting. At the seams it tears
to give way for what is yesterday's heir.
This gives way for change, our history clean.

No longer against us, time behold.
The sun at our backs and our story told.

Art and Photography



Erin Cline



Chelsie Mummert



Chelsie Mummert