
The Writer's Block

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Letter from the Officers

On behalf of the writer's block student organization, we would like to formally thank each person involved in making this year’s literary magazine. Coming back strong after such a successful first magazine is truly an honor and privilege that not many start-up magazines have. To thank every individual is a true feat, as a plethora of people helped make this second magazine a reality; that doesn't mean we won't try.

Thank you to every Writer's Block club officer, every volunteer, every editor, every club member and every single person who submitted to the magazine. You treated us with fresh stories, art, and perspectives, and you truly made this project one to be remembered. Many days and nights of hard work, frustration, laughter, and stress made "Expanding Horizons" the beautiful compilation it is. We also extend our thanks to all administration and staff who helped us along the way, as well as all of our generous sponsors. Thank you for encouraging and believing in us.

"Expanding Horizons" is a product of pure creativity, vigor, and love. We hope you enjoy.!

Sincerely,
The Officers of The Writer's Block:

Qiana Hunt, President
Alan Brown, Vice-President
Sydney Johnson, Secretary
Autumn Helton, Parliamentarian
Charles Box, Treasurer
Hannah Thomas, Promotion Officer
Peter Hester II, Consultant
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And our talented editing team:

Robert Jones
Tristan Cone
& Qiana Hunt

Thank you for making this publication a success!
Eyes strained and crusted with time,
The night sky turned to the morning sun
and gave dawn to a new light--
    Yes, I arose.
I eluded the night sky,
yet fell victim to the sun's desire.
The sun then bathed my skin,
my skin lay darkened to mark its jealousy.
Its rays yearned to tame my curves,
but we both knew I was already free,
I was radiant well before its embrace.

I felt your gaze across my spine,
Locks draped about me like a wisteria,
my back turned as you schemed to deflower me again.
As if you could forgo your innocence more than once;
As if you ever had a choice in the matter.
I stood before you, undraped, and thought, what will you do?
    I owned you.
I pulled your heart-strings,
stealing the notes from your tongue every time I stepped.
With each word I spoke, I gave you breath and bound you to my ventriloquy.
    I was beyond seduction.
I struck the tune of your heartache as I drew out your chords and harmonies with the stroke of my hand—I was power.

Hot lead searched for the flesh of its lover,
it disregarded its soft embrace.
I mourn at the thought of this being over
yet, it seems life has more in store for me.

- Kareem Garriga
I fight for Caleb.

Nothing else. I don’t fight for the glory or for the fame from the people crowding around the ring, or even for the satisfaction I feel when I see the blind fear in my opponent’s eye right before we clash. I don’t fight for the money. I don’t even fight because I like it.

I fight for Caleb.

He says I’m the best he’s ever seen. Yeah, I’m slow to start, but that’s because I’m big. He says my muscle is why he bought me in the first place. I may not be as fast as the other guys, may not be able to keep up with them all the time, but they have to get in my face eventually. And when they do, I don’t let them get away.

Ever.

I don’t lose. I’ve been doing this for a while.

Caleb says my defense is pretty much impossible to break. Nobody ever gets through it because by the time they even get close enough to try, I’ve already dealt the killing blow. I’m slow, but I’m strong. Stronger than anybody.

For Caleb.

He says he’s going to let me take a break after this one, that I’ve been doing so good lately I deserve it. That’s why I love Caleb – he’s a good guy. I know he doesn’t care about me like I do for him, but that’s okay.

I’ll always fight for Caleb.

This round, I’m up against a runt of a guy with beady black eyes. Too easy. I know he’ll be a quick one: he’s already breathing hard and shaking. Most of them are like that, though. When they see me? Some even piss themselves.

Caleb says my reputation has gotten pretty popular. He says I’m famous.

I don’t care about that.

I only care about Caleb.

The ring leader throws his hand up, and Caleb tells me to go. I go.

Me and the other guy meet like a thunderclap in the middle of the ring. My weight pushes him back a little, and I bear down on him without mercy. Maybe it’s because this is my last fight that I decide to dive in, to prove to Caleb that I can win no matter what. Nobody can kill me. I’m invincible – so long as I have Caleb.

I can hear him cheering at my back. He sounds so excited.

I can’t help myself. I feed off his elation. It’s like a drug, you know?

Me and the other guy, we’re trading blows left
and right. I open up on the side of his face and blood spatters across the floor in a gory spray. He gets me good above my left eye, and for a second, all I can see is red.

I stumble for the first time in my life. I can’t see anything but my own blood.

Caleb shouts in protest. He tries stopping the fight.

It’s too late.

The scrawny idiot jumps at me again and goes for the throat. I’m too shocked to stop him at first. All around us, people are screaming and beating at the fence surrounding the ring, caught up in the madness like they always are. But it’s different this time, kind of scary.

Maybe it’s because they aren’t cheering for me, anymore.

I almost lose my footing again when the guy’s jaw locks on my throat. I gasp and wheeze, fighting for air that’s suddenly really hard to get. I can hear Caleb yelling from outside the ring. I try to see past the blood and find his blue, blue eyes in the sea of strangers’ faces, but it’s pointless.

I go crazy then. I fight for my life like I never have before – probably because I never had to before. But the dumb leech just won’t let go. He squeezes tighter, and I can’t breathe. I can’t see. After a while, my legs give out, and I collapse there in the middle of the ring. My opponent crunches his jaws together with a snap. The killing blow. I feel my body jerk and spasm without my consent. I can’t even make a sound.

Someone finally makes him let go, but by then it’s too late.

I’ve lost.

I feel Caleb’s hands running over my thick fur. He’s gentle with me, and, see? I told you he’s a good guy. He’s even sobbing. I can hear the hitch in his breath as he says my name. He says I’m going to be okay.

We both know I’m not.

I try to see him past the blood in my eyes again, but I can’t, so instead I turn my head and lick the inside of his wrist. It’s the only apology I can give him. I spent my entire life fighting for Caleb.

I guess it’s only fitting that I die for him, too.
Micah found himself in an empty lobby. White marble columns held up the cathedral ceiling. The blue tiles on the floor were so clean, he could see his reflection in them. His head ached, and he was a bit confused. How had he gotten here? Looking over his shoulder, he saw that there were large arching double doors behind him. It was strange… he couldn’t have come through those doors; He had never seen them before. To each side were large picture windows, but the light streaming through them was so bright and dazzling that he couldn’t make out what was outside. He decided to search for answers.

Walking down the hall, he noticed how empty and lifeless the place was. Its many offices were abandoned. Chairs had been left neatly pushed up to each desk, with each door left slightly ajar. He was startled when he heard someone speak to him.

“You can come in now. I’m ready to see you.” The voice was soft and gentle, like a reassuring father. Micah turned to see the source: a man was seated at a grand mahogany desk with several files and folders spread out before him. Micah pointed to himself and silently mouthed, me? The man nodded in response, grinning.

Micah walked into the office, apprehensively surveying his surroundings.

“You can come in now. I’m ready to see you.” The voice was soft and gentle, like a reassuring father. Micah turned to see the source: a man was seated at a grand mahogany desk with several files and folders spread out before him. Micah pointed to himself and silently mouthed, me? The man nodded in response, grinning.

Micah walked into the office, apprehensively surveying his surroundings.

“Thank you for joining me. I’ve been looking forward to meeting you,” the man said. His skin was sickly pale, and he had thin lips. His wrinkled face was completely devoid of hair, and his head was bald as well. He eagerly looked at Micah, as if he was expecting something.

Micah forced an apologetic smile. “Well, I’m sorry if this is a dumb question, but… can you tell me who you are?” He felt like he knew this person, but couldn’t put a finger on how exactly they were acquainted.

“Do you know where you are?”
He shook his head. “I’m sorry, but no. I was going home after seeing a movie, and then... well, I’m just not sure.”

The man nodded with understanding. “That’s fine. Most people are disoriented after they die.”

Micah laughed nervously. He was ready to dismiss it as a joke, but the details began to come back to him piece by piece. It had been raining. Windshield wipers struggled frantically to wipe away the downpour. When he attempted to turn he hydroplaned and swerved out of control, right as the blinding headlights of an eighteen wheeler made him squint... He squirmed, remembering the tires screeching and the fear that gripped him shortly before the accident. “Oh god... I really am dead.”

The man smiled. “It’s alright now. You’re in Heaven. You won’t hurt like that again.”

“I suppose you’re Saint Peter or somebody like that?”

He scoffed. “No. I am God.”

“What about Jesus?”

“I am the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those are all facets of myself.”

Micah slowly nodded, not sure what to say. “Okay. I guess it’s nice to meet you.”

“It’s a lot to take in all at once, I know, but don’t worry. You have an eternity to understand these things. Everything is fine now.”

God showed Micah the way out of the building. They had been at a town hall in the middle of a small town that looked like something straight out of a postcard from the 1950s. Houses were lined up in neat little rows, with trees shading the sidewalks and white picket fences around each yard. “In your house, there are many rooms,” God said when he dropped Micah off at the door. “You can spend your time however you like. I’m sure it will accommodate you well.”

“Thanks, sir,” Micah said, although he wasn’t quite sure if “sir” was the right word.

“Call me if you need anything, and I will hear.” With that, God disappeared.

The inside of the house was neatly furnished. The living room had seashell pink walls and plenty of furniture, but something about it felt wrong. The couch, though it looked comfortable, was stiff to the touch. It felt less like a real couch and more like plastic dollhouse furniture. His bed was the same way. There were books on the shelves, but when he opened them all of the pages were blank. The TV in the living room only had one channel, and it was an image of pitch black darkness with soft choir melodies echoing from the distance.

It occurred to Micah that this house was not really a house. It was merely a facsimile of one. He began to grow disappointed when he realized that this surely must have been prepared by someone who had watched mortals for a long time, and did everything they could to recreate what they saw without ever truly understanding why mortals behaved the way they did or what they needed to live.

Walking down the sidewalk, he saw nobody else in the neighborhood. The emptiness of this place was unnerving. Even peering through the windows of other houses, he saw nobody at home. The doors were unlocked but it didn’t matter because the interior of each house was identical to his. When he heard the purr of a lawnmower engine in the distance, he was ecstatic. Another human soul!

However, when he followed the noise he
found God riding on the back of a lawnmower, drinking a glass of lemonade as he drove up and down the same line of perfectly trimmed grass.

“Where is everyone else?” Micah demanded as he approached.

God stopped the lawnmower. “Who else?”

“Well, I figure I can’t be the only one who ever died,” Micah said. “If this is Heaven, then where are all the other people who ended up here? What about my sweet Grandmother, who sang in the church choir every Sunday, only to wither away with Alzheimer’s despite all our prayers? What happened to my best friend Sonny, who fell in with the wrong crowd and died of an overdose when he was only 21?”

Tears began to well in his eyes. “Where is my favorite teacher from high school, who kept teaching even when cancer ate away at his spine, because he knew some of us kids came from dysfunctional homes and he was the closest thing we had to a father figure? Do you think they’re not good enough for heaven?”

“You are mistaken.” The voice came from behind him. Micah saw that there was another man, completely identical to God.

“There are two of you?”

“The spirit of God is everywhere, my child. Everywhere, all at once,” the one on the lawnmower said. His thin red lips stretched into a grin.

“Your loved ones have been here. But now they have gone to the Upper Sphere.” He pointed above, at the huge chrome sphere that shone in the sky in place of the sun.

“Please, please take me there,” Micah sobbed. “That’s all I want, is to see them again.”

“We cannot. The Upper Sphere is absolutely pure. There is no sin, no hunger, no thirst, no pain. They may not remember the sinful and flawed nature they once had. Only those who are like God may enter.”

“Well then how did they get up there?”

“They were purified, and became like God.”

“If that’s what I have to do... then so be it. Purify me, too.” He lowered his head, resigning himself to his fate.

Each one took Micah by the hand, and the three of them floated up towards the heavenly sphere. A circular hatch opened on its underbelly and they began to float inside. Dozens of hands reached out from the opening, their slender white fingers outstretched to him.

“No wait, this doesn’t feel right,” Micah said, trying to squirm free.

Hundreds of Gods, all identical, covered the sphere’s hollow interior. There were so many he couldn’t see an inch of the floor or ceiling. He realized that their faces, like the neighborhood, were a cheap imitation of humanity. Each one resembled a wrinkled rubber mask stretched over a theme park animatronic. “Please, no, I
changed my mind. Take me back. Let me out!”

It was too late.

God surrounded him on all sides. They reached out and grabbed onto him, dragging him deeper and deeper into the crowd. After a while, he stopped squirming. He began to forget what pain and sorrow felt like. Memories of his struggle as a mortal slipped away one by one. He tried to hang on to the memories of those he loved and lost, but it became more and more difficult as everything in his mind was replaced with memories of being with God.

There was a nursery rhyme his grandmother had sung to him when he was a child:

In heaven, everything is fine
I’m worried about nothing
Because nothing is on my mind.

But soon, even this slipped away from his memory. Micah had become like God.
Some Kind of Writer

So apparently,
I have a knack for writing.
Well, haikus, I mean.

I do not mean to.
It just happens by itself.
What is one to do?

My, my, there it is.
Did you see that, dear reader?
There it goes again.

It’s an accident.
Though those have five syllables,
I had no intent.

What a tragedy!
You must believe me, it is…
This could be my fault.

How could that be five?
And seven on the next line?
Why in this pattern?

Random thoughts must break
This wretched form I allow.
Here, hold this and watch;

“CHEEZ-ITS are the best
“Fantastic four-sided squares
“Satisfying me!”

I shout, feeling free;
Yet, here I am in plain chains,
Making more haikus.

Am I condemned now?
To write in one form only?
Can you deny me?

Answer these questions!
Come here and face me, my muse.
Reply to my pleas.

Clamor dies away.
My sense of pride fades away.
Doubt stirs her away.

Fine, be silent then.
I need you not, you coward;
Join my writer’s block.

No one else is here.
No one in the dark remains.
No one can hear me.

But here is my life:
Once in prose now in haiku.
Why not embrace it?

I stand, tall and firm.
Layered skies bow in respect.
I stand, confident.

Wonder what this is?
Not a curse but a blessing!
What else could it be?

I stand, wise and kind.
High mountains prostrate in awe.
I stand, majestic.

Hail the Haiku Lord.
He has reassured himself.
That is a hero.

What is he now, though?
Well, he’s some kind of writer,
So he may rejoice.

I love my haikus;
They express me very well.
Just look at this one.

-M. E. Alim
“Peace” By Laminda Fender
“Through the Looking Glass” by Robert Jones

Photograph By Qiana Hunt
We need a witness, they say, and the woman’s voice is like honeydew and her hair is spinning down towards the earth, spiraled by inertia or gravity or the weight of a well-preserved brain. The man holds her in by her waist, his square knuckles scrubbed bright and pink. For our wedding, he says. His voice is demure, and his hair is gruyere in texture, colour. Their clothes were not pressed; they had most likely been plucked up from a pile that had been formed from a drunken flounce on a hotel bed. They smile and I smile and I agree and I follow them to a church, a cathedral that is empty because it was late. On the way, over cobblestones and under bridge ways and passing by windows gripped with iron boxes of sleeping flowers, they tell me their names: Freya and Antony, crispy like paper plates. Freya is from the United States, Antony is from the inner mechanisms of Yorkshire. Antony tenders a creased photograph and explains that they met when she decided to jump a fence and run with the bulls and he jumped a different fence and decided to run with the Freya. She preferred apples to chocolate, and he held a distaste for almonds and soft cheese. Freya was a soprano two, but that never bothered her too much, not as much as it did when she was in school, and Antony didn’t see why people wore watches that were not strung on leather straps. Antony is never not referred to as Antony, and he is never bothered by anything of the sort, but he is bothered by the dust that crunched into the tile grout when he swept his mother’s kitchen floor. So he left and dissected animals at University, then he edited at University, then he drank at University, then he left University. She liked his ears and smile and he liked her teeth and eyes, among all of the other things that pheromones are involved in. They regard me with a cool nonchalance that is only granted to people who show up to a gathering unexpectedly, people who the other people are relieved to see because they had not called or answered the email about attending a class with them or had forgotten to mail a cousin a raspberry coloured birthday card, but also because they had missed the person they shared secrets with, secrets that are told in hiccupsing giggles and whispers beside the refrigerator in June. Antony prefers scotch and Freya prefers carrot juice and vodka, and claims that she wishes she had discovered it before her eyes had handed in their resignation, only to be saved by thick glasses that are often scratched by accident. They ask me about my drinking preferences, my political outlooks, my opinion on the use of the colour green, and whether it was appropriate enough for a nursery or not, they wonder from where had I left, if I regretted it, and after answering the first few questions I tell them that I had done nothing remarkable in my life, and that I did not really remember where I came from, nor did I care, but I had decided that I was fond of Italy and the coffee that was served in infinitesimal, ceramic chalices. They swallow my response and go on about how they have been together for a close year, about how their accents are starting to meld into a strange, coppery hybrid and whether or not cloth diapers were a responsible or fashionable choice. I am taken aback by the words that foam from the brims of their lips and circle through my ears, how the irises of both people swell at certain words and certain smells that walked by on their own. I am the fourth person to witness a hasty, unsure marriage and all I can think of is my shoelace that is unraveled. It is 64 degrees Fahrenheit, roughly 18 Celsius.

- Sydney Johnson
When another tremor jolted the plane, Dr. David Malice remained gazing sullenly out his window, mumbling. His fiancé, Dr. Arthur Crane, looked up from the short stack of papers he had been grading and removed his reading glasses.

"Did you say something?"

David’s first audible words since takeoff: “What does that even mean...’human’?” with ‘human’ coming out as a raspy, disgusted sigh.

The businessman behind them snored into a crumpled jacket.

Arthur’s face slackened.

David didn’t take his eyes from the vast opaque haze of the Alaskan wilderness roiling below, as though searching those impenetrable layers of congealed frost for what might finally loosen the meditative knot in his features.

"Is there even such a thing as being human?"

Dr. Malice and Dr. Crane oversaw the English Department at Oregon State, where they had met and fallen in love three years ago. Despite their living together for most of that time, David retained a peculiar secrecy about his family; refraining from any correspondence with any relatives in the time Arthur knew him. That was until two weeks ago, when a letter arrived from his mother; David’s father had passed from an unnoticed aneurysm that finally burst in his sleep and in the inherent time of grief and introspection that follows such a loss, she wanted to reconnect with her long-estranged son and his fiancé. Arthur had cradled the tear-wrecked remains of his lover when the words sent David crumbling to the kitchen floor.

‘Why did she wait so long to write you?’

‘She has her reasons.’

They had purchased two round trip tickets to visit David’s childhood home in Nome, Alaska, and as the day of the trip loomed, David became what a prescription bottle in his carry on called “Dissociative.” But even with his increased medication, Arthur noticed David becoming more and more withdrawn, prone to extended spells of daydreaming. Now David’s ruminations seemed to be bubbling over. Arthur whisked his half-graded papers back into his carry-on.

“Where did that question come from?”

“Since that letter, I can’t help but think about...what my father said when he kicked me out of the house.”

A shudder ran through the plane. Arthur looked at the three other passengers on the plane, searching for perked ears. The businessman let out a snarl before
settling back to sleep. The Flight Marshall was perusing through an issue of Sky Mall across the narrow aisle in the second to last row beside another slumbering man in shackles. Arthur reasoned that the Marshall wouldn’t hear them over the plane’s persistent hum.

“I haven’t thought about him in so long, and now, it’s like those words are all I have left of him. My relationship with my parents is... tempestuous, at best.” David smirked at the pretentiousness of using such a word as tempestuous, but it was a face that waned as spontaneously as it appeared.

Arthur felt a pang of guilt, remembering how supportive his family had been when he came out to them.

The pilot’s voice squawked over the intercom. A massive storm had overtaken their course, the reduced visibility forcing them to land at a nearby private airstrip. The Marshall licked his thumb and flipped another page.

“To my mother, I was her little boy, but as soon as my father caught wind of what I was, he threw me out of the house. Literally. He kicked the shit out of me in our front yard, the same yard he used to watch me run around in as a kid. In a moment I’d gone from being seven and throwing a baseball around with him to... I still know how a steel toed boot feels against my stomach. I remember him saying things like, ‘You’re no son of mine, you’re not deserving of this family, don’t you understand what we’ve sacrificed for you...?’”

Arthur finally realized why David hadn’t been asked to come to the funeral.

“David, maybe we should talk about this la-”

David’s voice had taken on a quietly frantic pattern, as though the words would keep the dams in his tear ducts from bursting: “I don’t blame my mother for what happened, though. I mean, what could she do? He was her husband, and if she had gotten in his way...”

The right wing bounced suddenly, causing the businessman to groan back to life.

“I could never go back to the house I had lived in for sixteen years without the risk of being shot in the driveway. But you know what hurt the most? And I’m certain this is the last thing he ever said to me: ‘You’re not human, you’re less than a man, you’re a sodomite, an animal.’ All I can think about now is... what does that even mean? If I’m not human...what was-“

“You’re not the monster, David, he was. What he did to you was... cruel, and, and, vicious.”

“And what is humanity if not those very things? If I’m not human, why would I want to be? If there’s anything I’ve learned about history it’s that mankind is... inherently destructive, and devoutly so. We lust for the opportunity to destroy things, particularly each other. Human beings are made up of such ugly dimensions.”
“Most human beings have a conscience. Something your father clearly didn’t have.”

“Our conscience is only exercised when we feel shame for doing something that isn’t socially acceptable, or that’s morally wrong. But what counts as acceptable anymore? Its boundaries are ever-changing; it’s nearly impossible to define what is truly normal. I mean, didn’t God fill Adam and Eve with shame for being naked? Now we say nudity is beautiful and created ‘#Free the Nipple’. Or how about ‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’? It seems like in the past couple thousand years, mankind has found plenty of ways to validate slaughtering each other. If my father had killed me, it would have been considered an ‘honor killing’. Can you imagine?”

“You really think your father would have killed you?”

“I know he would have. To him, it would have been like putting down a dog.”

“Wouldn’t your mother stop him?”

“You have no idea how isolated Nome really is. Their house is twenty miles from the nearest town. If you ever want to see the human spirit, unobstructed, simply look at what a man does when he’s that far from any kind of scrutiny. Consequence doesn’t hold as much weight out here. He would have killed us both.

“You know, in college, I wanted to believe that maybe there was some truth in literature that would convince me not all people were like him, and that deep down we all desire to be better people. But all I’ve learned is that heroism is nothing but romanticized drivel. Heroes die young, and our most basic instinct is to survive. You can’t be a hero in a Darwinian world. That’s why in a crisis, there are no more heroes, only caricatures of the worst qualities a man can possess. People crawl over each other rather than save each other. That’s how it’s always been, and always will be.”

“There are still good people in the world, David; people with morals.”

“Morals that we shirk when it’s convenient. Given enough time, civilization will plunge into an orgy of strong preying on
weak and what we call a ‘conscience’ becomes ‘an impediment of progress’. To be human is to disguise your disgust for everything that strays from your own personal interests, but our masks are coming apart slowly, and we’ll be forced to see the evil buried in ourselves; no bottom to the well of cruelty we’re capable of inflicting on one another. And if there’s nothing beyond that, then...why bother living?”

The right wing suddenly dropped, the deafening sound of landing gear being stripped away. A gaping mouth of oblivion tore through the front two rows and ripped Arthur from his seat, tearing his ragdoll silhouette violently into the void. David struggled to keep his eyes open, the oxygen masks ascending like flaccid slingshots, but his hands clung desperately to the armrests, unable to fight the crushing pressure that kept his chest from rising.

When David finally awoke, he was still strapped into his seat, snow scratching at his numb face. The businessman was gone. The Marshall remained in his seat, eyes wide and lifeless, frost already thick on his grey suit. The handcuffed man was already heading for the light of a control tower in the distance. Disoriented, David stepped out into the blizzard, wind slicing through him like a fleet of diamond-tipped arrows. The head of the plane had blazed a mile into the featureless landscape, tendrils of lit fuel cutting the snow. David followed the handcuffed man’s dark silhouette in the unfathomable whiteness toward the control tower at the far end of the empty airstrip.

When he finally reached the foot of the control tower, David beaten body collapsed to the tile floor, having been tossed by the wind like a violent tide. A panicked air traffic controller wrapped him in a wool blanket and ushered him inside to sit with the other survivor, who sat quietly in a row of chairs against a back wall, his shackled hands clutching an identical blanket around his torso. The ATC shouted into a headset that only replied with static before ascending a staircase to his workstation. As the two men sat, their future uncertain, David turned to the handcuffed man.

“What were they extraditing you for?”

“Insurance fraud. I set fire to my own house to collect on the insurance. What I didn’t know was... my kid had played hooky and was hiding out in the basement. By the time I heard the screams, the walls had already given. Between the home and life insurance policies, I had more money than I knew what to do with. But you can’t bribe your conscience. I’ve been all over the world, trying to escape what I’d done. You know what makes people into monsters? I think it’s when you’re told your whole life that if you have enough money, that if you get exactly what you want, you’ll finally be happy, only to realize that no matter how much money and comfort you have, it’s never going to be enough. And the things that make life truly worthwhile, well, they’re already gone.”

David looked out at the frenzied snow. He slowly rose from his seat, shed his blanket and made his way to the exit.

“Where are you going?”

“He’s still out there.”

The storm had grown deafening. David fought through the electric wasteland until the tail end of the plane was in view and began to shed his clothing. His chest pounded against the cold. Snow clung to flesh. Out past the plane’s carcass, his shins finally struck Arthur’s mangled body, and after digging against the
rising snow, found the expressionless face, staring infinite and frosted. David removed his late lover’s fluorescent coverings and flattened himself against the rigid torso. He closed his eyes and thought about Oregon, about the warm light that filtered through his office window. Time passed arbitrarily as David waited for the storm to bury him.

From across the featureless plain, a string of black bodies trudged toward the wreckage. When they laid their hands on David, he could see that they were Inuit, faces framed in animal furs. They slid his failing body into a warm stretcher made of hide, dragging him to their village inside a stretch of trees beyond the pale horizon.

The air traffic controller would return to the lobby to find both David and the handcuffed man missing, their blankets resting like shed husks on the checkerboard linoleum.
"Let the Great World Spin" by Hannah Thomas

Photograph By Peter Hester II
“Table” By Laminda Fender
The first thing the creature felt was an almost unbearable itch. All over the creature's body, it felt a prickling sensation, prompting it to move. Slowly, the creature gathered itself together and pushed. It floated to the left.

The creature now grappled with a new feeling, not external but internal. It felt a sense of accomplishment. The feeling was incredibly pleasant but faded away almost as quickly as it had arisen, which seemed hardly fair to the creature. It had liked the experience and now wanted... The creature now categorized a new emotion: want.

First, the creature decided, it needed to find a way to satisfy his want for a sense of accomplishment. What had been a simple desire to get off an itch had evolved into a quest to accomplish something. Casting caution to the wind, it decided it needed to explore its environment.

The creature pushed and manipulated its body to produce two protruding limbs, so that it could propel itself within its environment. It was well on its way, swimming through the environment, when it came upon something hard. It pushed against this opposing force, trying to swim past it or through it, but to no avail. It tried to swim in the other direction, but only found another hard object impeding it. The creature repeated this possess several times before giving up in that approach. It now had a new idea, though: going up.

The creature pressed itself against the hard service, its malleable skin sticking to the object, and the creature slowly started to lift itself up. As it did so, it broke through its liquid environment into another, unfamiliar world. The creature let out a hiss as it felt its skin sting slightly, adjusting to the new atmosphere. After a moment or two, it continued upwards. The creature began to enjoy the experience, free of the liquid it had been born in, until it tumbled over the edge of the hard object and fell, landing with a painful thud upon another hard object.

The creature just lay there, comprehending the new sensation it felt: pain. It did not like this sensation, and knew it would have to be more careful next time. As if adapting to this thought, the creature’s body started to develop an orb at the top front of the creature’s body. Suddenly, the creature could see. It looked around, astonished by the new sense, taking the world around it. So many things the creature had no concept for, so many directions in which to explore; it was absolutely giddy with excitement.

Crawling along the hard surface, it moved away from the rack of test tubes from which it came, and where another creature very similar to it began to awaken.
The Princess My Keeper

Great allure and splendid honey keep you
Alive and well, Sarah, for my delight.
What say you, my buzzing muse, for us to
Elope off to the horizon in flight?
Mustard seeds and daffodils, so fragrant
These memories that forever taunt me.
In your grand absence, I earnestly rant
Of how I am to live apart from thee.
My somber chamber, maroon and center
Is in your command. And this humble drone
Merely follows – only you may enter.
Mesmerized I am done, working by zone.
As we were in two corners of the town,
I’ll hasten always for you and your Crown.

- M. E. Alim

“Queen of Sunset Skies” by Hannah Thomas
Paeter Aestas
(The Father of Summer)

I left you behind in the summer,
You loved the sunshine and warm
And though I was your winter child,
You still took me by the arm.
Time will pass without you,
The sun will shine again.
But everything about you,
Will be with me in the Rain.

- Laney Jolley
The experience is difficult to describe
It’s like dropping a small, smooth stone over a body of water
Watching it spiral downwards
Cutting through the air
But instead of slipping into the volume
The stone slaps at the surface, and stops,
Like it’s contacting pavement
Still.
Everything is so still.
That’s how it is.

She used to serve me cranberry juice
On those days when my body wanted to give up on me
But even when I felt okay
I still wanted to be sick with her.

She’s sick now, but it’s not like I had known
I had been away, and slowly she spiraled
Closer and closer to the pavement
It seemed to be approaching faster the longer it went on.

Eighty-nine years now
She says her mind is swimmy
Her shadow is being swallowed up
The pool is icing over
Rapidly.

The pavement has yet to be knocked
But I know it’s almost time
Her dialogue seems so wasted
Already, I see her still
And I feel the chill
There’s nothing under that coat of ice
The pool is shallow and dead.

Dead
Still.

- Brittany Wood

“Innocence” By Laminda Fender
You scale the marble museum steps,
Crocheted scarf swimming upstream,
Pirouette mid-step to release your breath;
Silken, tangled piano strings tango
Frothing out your mouth and across the eves
As wind strips your rippling words vacant,
Reducing you to a convulsing cackling mime.
I raise the Kodak, slick in my shivering hands,
And bleach your world brilliant and benign;
Nicotine cuticles barely snag the thumbwheel
As you draw me into the sleeping courtyard,
Where we roll our roots in tobacco leaves.

Arm-locked friction sends sparks catching kindling,
Our match heads bouncing back to the din of the Metro,
Humming nonsense, bizarre but intrinsic somehow;
Native to that pocket, packed in that first mumbling waltz,
Only to sublimate over years in my milky mind;
Since you disappeared, I’ve found pins and needles
To dissect my memories, sprawling and fetal,
Buried under silver antennae adorning my scalp.
I am told you’ve been dead, and many times before,
But I’m sure you’re still laughing on those marble steps,
And If you’re not there, then I hope you’re home.

- Garrett James Hibbard
There was never a single lesson
Telling me how to catch my dreams.

I never took a course
Detailing my own emotions.
I was never assigned a book
On how to hear my heart,
Or even how to translate its message
If I could listen.

So when you tell me
"It's over,"
"I love you,"
"I see us
Together,"

I don't know how to react.
My teachers lectured about
History,
Calculus,
Biology,
But never about human chemistry.
I didn't learn this in school,
So will you teach me?

- Robert Jones
This is how things look:

Pink linoleum
Stains that are rusted
Water that slides and frets away at the sheen
Damp towels

You are cold

You are dead and alive and flaking away and you have shaken off that mortal coil, pushed it into a box where things are stored for later, you are colder than you thought you could be and you can still feel your own fingers twist and crinkle in your shirt, your collar is crunchy, you remember that you forgot the slabs of meat in your ice chest and they gather tiny organisms and lives, you remember that you should have planned ahead, you push your thoughts far into a corner that no one ever seems to dust, where there is a small overnight bag that has been neatly packed, and you, you seem to catch your reflection in a shoddy compact and you see your expressions that are the results of other faces that were pressed together in dark places and quiet nooks.

- Sydney Johnson
At the end of the Barrel

By Thomas Siegler

The gun was raised.

The young man’s life began at a small orphanage, where each night he would rock in a cradle, innocently unaware of what was to come as he grew older. In the toddler years of his life, he found it hard to get along with the other orphans around him. He was always the punching bag of the others, being the target of everyone’s tantrums. He would always be blamed, never able to plead innocent, and was often taken aside and punished for disobedience. He never even touched another orphan, and as he grew up, he avoided contact with the others, afraid of being beaten again. Even though he never spoke to any of the other orphans or even came near them, they would always take their anger out on him, and he was always the one being disciplined.

The gun was cocked.

In the summer when he became a teenager, a couple had visited the orphanage and adopted him. They smiled at the sight of him, and he walked happily beside them as they left the wretched place. They treated him as their own, giving him love and care, telling him that they once had a child that they had lost. Countless days were spent making memories with his adoptive father, doing a variety of recreational activities that bonded them close together. Countless nights were spent with his adoptive mother, as she taught him to cook and take care of himself. They lived in a different city from the orphanage, away from those who had picked on him all his life. He finally felt at home. When the summer ended, he began public school and met a new group of people. Like in the orphanage, he became a target of bullies who couldn’t hold their temper. He took the beatings, not knowing what to do for himself. Countless days he spent with the father practicing to defend himself, exhausting his body completely while listening to the stories told of the father’s time at war. Countless nights were spent with the mother tending to the wounds he got while practicing and sharing his thoughts and feelings, using her shoulder to cry on.

The gun was steadied.

He came home late one day, face bloodied but smiling, for he finally was able to fight back, and
he was glad he was able to beat the person who had been beating him. He called out for the mother to help clean up the blood, but she never answered. He called for the father, who didn’t answer either. He then began to navigate the house until he came to the living room, where he found their bodies lying across the floor, surrounded by a pool of blood. He cried at the loss of the only two who cared for him, and when help arrived, they only took him away and threw him back into the orphanage that he came from. There he was welcomed with harassment. The other orphans were never told what had happened, so they chanted that he was unwanted and would never be loved by anyone.

Months later, a man had appeared, coming to adopt him. The man claimed to be his father, and tears rolled down his cheeks as he was adopted once more. He left the orphanage happy, thinking that his life may turn around.

The safety was taken off.

The father was a drinker. Every day, several empty bottles would pile around the house as the man sat in front of a television screen. The father had an injury in the leg and wasn’t able to work, so checks from the old job paid for living. He never got to spend time with the father, and he was always told to keep quiet and not to be annoying. Whenever he would try to mention his mother, he would be met with a backhand, throwing him onto the floor. The father yelled at him for the tears he shed and beat him some more. After the beating was over, he was sent to his room where, if he tried to leave, the beatings would continue. At the new school he attended, he was still targeted by bullies. He constantly got into fights to protect himself, but he lost every single one because of the beatings from home. It was hard to tell what injury came from where, so the school only suspended him for being a fighter. When he returned home, he was punished again for his misconduct and locked away in his room. The cycle continued for years. He constantly had cuts and bruises all over him. He never had a friend to talk to or to be there for him. He was alone, and when he got close to graduating, he was expelled for winning a fight. After he returned home that day, the father threatened to kill him, so he threw the man onto the ground and ran off, never looking back.

The trigger was pulled.

He lived alone on the street for years, finding odd jobs to do, but never looking anyone in the face. He was able to keep himself fed, but he had nothing else to his name. One day, a man told him to look up if he was to work, but when he came face-to-face to the man, everything changed. The man called him a freak, saying his eyes were unnatural, and then threw him out onto the street. It was the first time he realized how different his eyes were. Everyone around him had brown eyes, where he had dark blue eyes. He was an outcast, and soon the word of his eyes spread to other employers, and he no longer could find work. Soon the people on the streets began to beat him. They took what little money he had while they spat on him and called him a freak. He decided to go to where he felt at home, the house of the first adoptive parents.

The ringing filled the ears.

He found the house with the police tape still around. He tore off the tape on the door and found it unlocked. He made his way inside to see that everything was untouched. He was hit
with a wave of a nauseating odor that made him gag. He made his way to the living room where he found the rotted bodies of the parents still lying where he last saw them. The blood stains still covered the floor. He began to cry as he was reminded of the good times with the parents, and he wished that he could join them. He then looked at the picture taken when he was first adopted. He froze as he stared at the parents. The gun fell to the ground.

The parents had the same color eyes as he. He had never noticed before that their eyes were blue. Finally, he knew why they accepted him. He also noticed how he looked similar to them, and it was then that he realized that their love for him was not like the love for their lost child; it was the love of their lost child. He concluded that they were his parents all along, and the other man had lied to him. He searched the house for evidence. He found a journal that his father kept, which explained how the war times interfered with the raising of him, so they regretfully had to put him in an orphanage until they returned. He learned that his parents were not local, and that they were planning to move home when they were murdered. He also came across a pistol with a single bullet in the magazine, and he instantly knew what must be done.

The tear rolled down his cheek.

He grabbed the keys to the car in the garage and quickly started it. He drove past the orphanage, watching as a child walked out with new parents. He raced back to the second man that adopted him and parked car halfway in the driveway. Jumping out, he approached as the man appeared in the doorway of the house. He pushed the man down, called him a liar, and beat him against the ground. The man admitted to the lies, claiming to even have killed his real parents, but wouldn’t tell a reason why. He didn’t care why anymore; he only wanted to get revenge...

The gun was raised. The gun was cocked. The gun was steadied. The safety was taken off. The trigger was pulled. The ringing filled the ears. The gun fell to the ground. The tear rolled down his cheek. Time had slowed as he took a life, whose body lay at his feet. He returned to the car and drove away to find where he was from – to find out who he truly was.

“Magnolia” By Laminda Fender

https://louis.uah.edu/writers-block/vol2/iss1/1
“Giants” By Christina A. Polosky

“Puppy Bejeweled” By Christina A. Polosky

“I See Welfare in Your Future” By Daisy Smith
My dreadful soliloquy as I lay on your floor, dying—Part II

That hurts, stop, don't hold me so tight
I'm sorry, I meant “that's alright”
I love your touch, how could I not?
You with your redwood build,
The man who stands unmatched by the rest,
restless.

With your roots outstretched, you entangle me.
When your leaves began to fall and I felt myself unearthed,
I saw nothing left of you but the dismal skeletons that I've now built a home upon.
You used to bloom in ambrosia springs,
but nowadays something else flows,
something flamboyantly cascading down my cheeks.
Looking back, I never thought that in summer, I'd know winter's touch.
The tracing of your fingers on my calloused lips,
mismatched to the new-found rhythm of your heart.

On my knees and against the wall,
I'm taken to feigned appearances and disregarded conversations.
How much longer must I suffer?
You, with the communication skills of an unpainted canvas,
changing from a melancholy white to a grim maroon at a moment's notice.
You, to whom in love, I handed the brush.
As I've watched you pull the bristles of my being with your clenched fists,
scarlet stains on your hands now remain.
Yes, you enervate me!
I mean, you elevate me,

No! For this, I'll no longer stand.
Shedding tears and leaving scarlet trails,
as if it will help your manhood play these woeful games of hide-n-seek.
You, whose peasant fingers yearn to reap these lands they'll never own,
You who once breathed new life into my soul,
I now rust to your touch.
Once again, hot lead searched for the flesh of its lover,
it disregarded its soft embrace.
I tire at the thought of this being over
yet, it seems life has more in store for me.

- Kareem Garriga
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