

BESIDE The Point



TIME 2018

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Designed and printed by the Print Services Department at Camosun College
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Beside the Point is produced on the traditional territories of the Lkwungen and WSÁNEĆ peoples in Victoria, British Columbia, by the members of Camosun College's Editing and Publishing class (Creative Writing 159).

Published by Camosun College English Department
3100 Foul Bay Road Victoria BC. V8P 5J2

ISSN 1918-8714
Volume 6

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EDITORIAL

What is the meaning of time? Time itself is infinite, but people are aware of it only for the duration of their lives. Time goes on when we do not. It is for this reason alone that every individual is so concerned with leaving their mark—something tangible to tie human lives together and say, we were here, and we did something that mattered. It might be as profound as learning what we are meant to do in this world, or as simple as performing small acts of kindness to make a stranger's day. We are all capable of action; what truly matters, though, is what we choose to do with our limited time.

In this issue of *Beside the Point*, our authors and artists worked tirelessly within multiple genres to create several mind- and genre-bending stories, poems, and visual art works, each drawing on the theme of time and how it changes us throughout our lives. People have an unparalleled ability to celebrate all the good things in life, as well as heal from unimaginable loss. Though our main theme is time and its meanings, many smaller themes provide our readers with multiple perspectives and ideas. A common sub-theme among pieces selected for this issue is reflection: characters look within to find meaning, or they wonder what could have been.

Many of our pieces show the depth of human growth and understanding, including acceptance of what cannot be changed. We at *Beside the Point* believe these themes speak to people from all walks of life. Each piece explores time's influence on an individual, on one's cultural heritage, and on the relationships that we forge with loved ones and with the world.

The works in this literary journal are melancholic and thoughtful, happy and

playful, and most importantly hopeful and inspiring. By nature, written language is indelible, and the pieces selected for this issue are no exception. We're honoured to share with you the work of these skilled storytellers. While we know that every journey through this unpredictable, wonderful life is unique, we trust that each reader will come away enriched, whether by an enjoyable read, a laugh or two, a personal epiphany, or even renewed hope for the things to come. We invite you to keep returning to these stories, each time making new and exciting discoveries.

We wish you an entertaining read and an influential experience, and we hope you find our selections both down-to-earth and unbelievably imaginative!

—Kelsey Worth and the *Beside the Point* team

CREATIVE NONFICTION | Julia Ming

WHAT DOES SHE WANT?

She seemed to abandon me in a tunnel with no light at the end. I struggled to stay afloat in a sea of hopelessness and inadequacy. Eased only by the comfort of my bed, I fluctuate between sleeping and staring at the ceiling, swimming through memories of what got me here. I used everything up until it lost its magic—a drink, a drug, a lover. Waves of white sheets encased me until I could muster the energy to surrender. Seeking answers for my depressed soul, now I sink into a riptide of low serotonin levels and whiskey.

Time is relentless, always flowing, and moving—never pausing to wait for an individual. She'll never give me the same moment twice. What can put meaning to this space I must exist in? Humans accept this system developed to structure our days, as we wander through a rolling pattern of wake and sleep. It seems she is used to govern a measure of progress, giving purpose to my life.

As our relationship progresses, I accept my place with her. I spent too long in the sea, and she helps me to recover. I pull myself out of bed and begin to practice routine to establish any feeling of normalcy. The void that lives inside me slowly starts to fill with books, friends, and meaningful conversation. Life gradually beats with vibrancy again. Every event Time paints presents an opportunity to expand my being.

I find myself more empathetic, more analytical, and more patient than the day before. It's not what she's done with me, but what I've done with her. Had I drowned in the riptide, there would have been no time to swim in the beauty of her.

When I began doing meaningful things with her, she became healing and forgiving. She

carries my existence. It is up to me entirely to attach little or great impact to each moment. The complete autonomy over my choices shapes the potential for my expanding self. It is too easy to drown in worries of the future or past mistakes. She taught me that by admitting the pain of my world, I can work through it and be released from my thoughts. Floating up into the atmosphere, my mind encounters new stories.

Time told me if I look for opportunities of growth within her, she would be kind to me. If I listen to my body and its cravings, she will support me, and I will feel contentment in her. The waves of sheets become calm waters as I climb out of bed each day, eager to explore with her. She wants whatever I want, because she is mine for the taking. She compiles my experiences to create the being I am, constantly evolving, never a fixed entity—growing in this dimension of Time with no definitive end, beginning or explanation.

POETRY | Anthea Gaunt

MULAN

Face frozen in determination,
dressed in robes of forest green,
you were every soldier's heroine.
Time and love have chipped your paint.

How long did you wait in that thrift store,
before I found and took you home?

Your plastic joints are loose from days
playing together in the park sandbox
and the muddy grass beside my house.

Climbing bookshelf and bedpost mountains,
you carried me through childhood,
and took us far beyond the safety of my room,
across scorching deserts and surging seas.

Until I grew.

Forgotten, you lay amongst broken comrades
at the bottom of a lonely toy bin.

Years later,
rummaging hands
felt a familiar shape.
Part of me that was lost,
I remembered as I held you.

I may channel my creations differently now,
through song and dance, poetry and prose,
but my storytelling started with you.

Now, you sit on my shelf with chin held high,
bestowed your rightful place of honour:
on the back of a Great Dragon, sword in hand.
Your eyes are still determined, as if you know
your grand adventures are far from over.



LITERARY FICTION | Bailey Legare
EARLY SPRING SPICE

"Early spring is beautiful," Elizabeth thought, taking a deep lungful of the cool air. The day would be much better spent outside of this carriage, but it was a smooth and quick way to travel in the countryside. The plush and comfortable grey seats with the dark oak was beautiful. The sun sparkled on the lake just outside of the window. Almost as blue as the sky, the lake had a slight hint of green to it.

Elizabeth slightly leaned out the window and shaded her eyes from the dazzling sunlight to get a better look. In the very far end of the lake was a field of flowers, so many you could tell what colour they were from over seven leagues away. Most of the flowers looked to be dusk pink and lavender purple. Trees that surrounded the field must have helped to block out the harsh winter winds for there to be flowers.

Soon the lake was left behind and changed for rolling hills of wheat. A soft breeze made the golden wheat dance and wave as they passed. It seemed only a moment later that the rolling wheat changed to forest.

Elizabeth sat back into the carriage. She would have much rather her father had let her go to court than send her to visit her Aunt Astrea.

Her father, Baron of Staroit, had told her, "You will need to go visit your aunt. She is getting on in her years and some company will do her good." Remembering that she was on a social visit made it more pleasant.

Letters that her cousins sent to her depicting court just made her want to go so much more. Their days were spent gossiping, talking about who was courting who. That was her sort of politics. Those thoughts helped to remind her of the dream she had of attending a festival.

In her dreams, she would wear a deep blue velvet gown with clear white gems that would contrast with her dark hair.

For the rest of the trip, Elizabeth ignored the world outside and planned her future in her head. She was so wrapped up, she did not even realize that the carriage had stopped, let alone where she was. The door of the carriage opening startled Elizabeth back to present time. Her lead escort poked his head in the door of the carriage. She would have thought him good looking, except his hair looked unkempt and he had dirt on his clothes.

"We have arrived at Lady Astrea's," he said as he stepped back and helped Elizabeth down from the carriage. Dirt. All she could see was dirt. Things growing in dirt. Things with dirt on them. She liked flowers, but not the dirt they grew in.

"Please tell me this is the wrong place!" she exclaimed quietly so that only the escort could hear. However, all she got in response was a chuckle as he started off towards the house.

Her first impression of the house was that it wasn't too bad, but a bit shabby. The colour of the stone was old and faded. The porch looked tidy enough, with chairs off to the side to sit and talk on. What bothered her was more-so the fact that the house seemed to stand in the middle of a massive mud puddle. Elizabeth wished that she could walk in the opposite direction of the house.

If she remembered his name right, it was Elliot. By the time Elizabeth had made it halfway across the puddle, Elliot had already arrived at the door. It wasn't until she had reached the edge of the porch that a woman answered the door.

Bowing, Elliot spoke. "Good afternoon. I am here to deliver Miss Elizabeth to her aunt, Lady Astrea." The lady's hair was piled into a bun encased in a light-coloured braid. Her apron was covered in a mess of colours, and

some white powder stuck to her face as well as her hair.

“Oh Elizabeth! Darling!” The lady dusted her hands on her apron, quickly stepped forward, and brought her into a hug. All that was going through Elizabeth’s head was this was a dream. No way did her mother have family that lived in a place like this. No way would a wife of a Baron come from a family with this sort of house!

“Aunt Astrea?” Elizabeth slowly questioned, afraid of the answer. She really hoped she was wrong. That did not seem to be the case when she stepped back and nodded.

Aunt Astrea smiled. “You must be famished from the journey, so come in, I am almost finished making lunch.” She turned to better face Elliot. “Would you mind letting the others know once they stable the horses they are welcome to come in for some food?”

Elliot smiled widely and bowed deeply, agreeing as he left to talk with the other escorts.

Her aunt led her into the house. While Elizabeth looked around, she noted that there were so many paintings in the entrance hall that it was hard to see what colour the walls behind them were. The paintings seemed to mostly consist of flowers, and some had two young girls in a garden. The walls were similar all the way through the house until they reached the kitchen.

“Now,” her aunt started to say as she looked around. The kitchen was what most would call cozy-looking. A large wooden table took up the middle of the room. The table was occupied with strange-looking cooking implements, a fire to the right and a stone oven on the left. “...ah! There the darn thing is,” she exclaimed. Before Elizabeth knew what happened, she had a bundle of cloth thrown at her.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” Elizabeth asked, holding the cloth out in front of her.

Aunt Astrea looked at her like she was a child not knowing how to put their feet into shoes. “Well, you wear it. Wouldn’t want to get a mess on such a pretty dress now would you?” She just shook her head and went back to the pot of stew.

The apron had two long strips that Elizabeth assumed were the ties, so she slipped it on to cover as much of her dress as it was able to.

Once it was on, she asked her aunt, “What do I do now?” Looking around, she felt completely lost. She had never stepped into a kitchen before.

“Why don’t you cut up some potatoes for the stew?” her aunt said, eyes never leaving the pot. Elizabeth looked around as she tried to find where the potatoes would be kept. It took her a little bit, but she finally found what she thought—or at least hoped—were some potatoes. Now all she had to do was to find something to cut the potatoes with.

After Elizabeth spent a couple of embarrassing minutes staring at the strange cooking implements on the table, her aunt came to her rescue and pointed out a small knife. Aunt Astrea also showed her how to cut them.

She had been cutting them into chunks, about the size of a chicken egg, for a little bit when her aunt came up behind her. “They look a little big for a stew. Maybe cut them in half?” her aunt suggested. Elizabeth was so focused on making the potato pieces smaller that she didn’t notice her aunt until she heard a light thunk-thunk-thunk across the table. Elizabeth looked up to see her aunt as she cut up the carrots in a quick fashion.

Astrea chuckled at seeing her niece looking like a fish out of water. “Stopping won’t get those potatoes done any faster,” she remarked as she continued to cut the carrots.

Finally all the potatoes and carrots were cut, and they carried them over to the pot to put

into the stew.

“Can you get the rolls out of the oven?” her aunt asked as she stirred the stew.

“Okay.” Elizabeth then went over to the oven. She looked inside and saw a flat tray with the golden-brown rolls on top. Elizabeth tried to pull out the tray with her hand. “Ouch!” she exclaimed as she yanked her hand back to her chest.

Her aunt rushed over. “What happened?”

Elizabeth showed her aunt her pink fingertips. “Everyone burns their hand at least once in a kitchen. You better go out to the well and soak it in some water.” Her aunt sighed and then grabbed a cloth to get the rolls out of the oven.

Elizabeth didn’t know exactly where the well was, so she went to the door on the other side of the kitchen. Beyond the door was the yard at the back of the house. Looking side to side, she saw the well to the right, a yard away from the house. At the base was a bucket that must have been used to gather water. She looked in the bucket and thankfully found that there was some clean-looking water.

Elizabeth soaked her hand thoroughly as she softly muttered to herself, “Why do I have to cook? It isn’t like it will be useful.” After she soaked her hand for what she deemed long enough, she went back to the kitchen.

“How is the hand?” Aunt Astrea asked as she walked toward her. She took Elizabeth’s hand into hers and inspected it. “That isn’t too bad.” She wiped her hands on her apron. “If you can bring these bowls out to the dining room that would be lovely.” She took the first two bowls from her aunt’s hands and brought them out to the dining room. After a couple more trips, she was finally placing the last serving of the stew, just as her escorts started to enter the dining room.

Elizabeth was so mortified, her face burned crimson. She never wanted anyone to see her

serving food. Not even her own father!

When everyone was seated at the table and before they ate, Aunt Astrea stood to speak. “The stew may not be the greatest as I am no cook. Sadly, my cook Samantha had to go home to visit her dying father. But please enjoy.”

Elizabeth had seen her aunt put a lot of strange things into the stew—what had looked like weird short pieces of grass and something that looked like leaves from a bush. How did those things make something that tasted this good? She had no clue, but she did want to find out, because not even her father’s own cook made stews as good as this one.

After the meal, Aunt Astrea was starting to clean up. She walked up to her aunt and asked, “How did you get it to taste so good?”

Her aunt chuckled. “Well, my mother, your grandmother, was a very avid gardener. She spent years finding new plants to grow. Your mother, on the other hand, liked to paint the flowers our mother grew. Personally, I preferred the herbs she would grow, and what you could do with them.” She started to clear the empty dishes.

“You can do things with herbs? Like what?” What use could something have that grew from the dirt?

“Some herbs help with cuts, headaches, and some with skin. There are plenty of them—and there are also some to be careful of! Nettles are not a plant to fool around with. They sting; however, they make a good tea.”

Elizabeth was shocked! Who knew that plants could have multiple uses? Her aunt might teach her about plants, or at least how to make a stew. However, she now knew she wanted to learn more about plants and her aunt.



It was over fifteen years later, and Elizabeth

was finally back at her Aunt Astrea's old house. The years had changed her, her dark hair had lightened from the sun, and she wore a simple blue dress. Maybe not the same as her childhood dreams, but she preferred this one. Astrea had passed four years ago, and Elizabeth was only now able to visit her aunt's estate. The memories just kept coming back. Summers and holidays were spent learning about different herbs and ways of cooking.

Elizabeth laughed to herself. After her first long visit to her aunt's, her father almost hadn't recognized her. Elizabeth's favourite memory of her Aunt Astrea was still the first day she was introduced to cooking and gardening; it felt like it was just yesterday.

HERSTORY OF A SPELL

Reds, yellows, and fiery oranges covered the coastline. The wind was crisp and dry, with the smell of salt and driftwood. The leaves were dying, but Stonington was very much alive. Everybody was in the streets celebrating the harvest. Laughter and the fragrance of dried herbs filled the air. Young witches gathered around wooden carts full of items for new potions and spells they were going to learn.

It was Jeune's favourite time of year. Staring out the rippled window pane of her Magical Philosophy class, she wished she could be part of the festivities. It's not that she wasn't interested in magic, it's that her passions were in plant life—spells, potions, soups, and cauldrons. She would daydream about herbs and salt crystals melding together and filling the room with their uplifting but sometimes unruly aromas. Also, her birthday was coming up soon. She was turning thirteen. It was a meaningful year.

Witch culture carried a deep history. Jeune knew she was a witch from the time she was born, but she was beyond excited for her first spell crafting. It was a tradition passed down through generations from one female witch in a family to the next when they reached the age of thirteen. The first spell in a witch's repertoire was to conjure a Pechealer Potion. It was a novice potion that could heal minor burns, cuts, scrapes, and bruises. It was even said to cure you of the flu.

Jeune dug around in her pocket and smoothed a small, crumpled piece of parchment across her desk. Resting her head onto her hands, she read:

Mildred's Mulch

Oaken's Oatstraw

Eugene's Noojoo Beans

Brilldebund's Bringle Wax

Each ingredient had its own story from the Witch's Lore. The Witch's Lore was a book that contained every ingredient used in the history of spell crafting. It listed where the ingredients originated and where in the world you could now find them. It had hand-drawn studies of what they looked like, smelled like, and acted like (if it was a living ingredient), but most of all, it told the history behind the first witch to ever use the ingredient in a spell. The list Jeune's mum had given her were ingredients that were cursed, blessed, and discovered by the most honoured witches in history.

Jeune smiled to herself and sighed as she sunk her head into her folded arms.

"Jeune? Jeune!"

Jeune shook her head and blinked wildly, recalling she was in the middle of an important lecture. Mrs. Arete was now scowling at Jeune impatiently.

"Uh... Sorry Mrs. Arete... I was just..."

"Well? Do you know where the first wand was created?"

"I-I-, sorry Mrs. Arete, I don't know."

"It would do you well not to daydream and focus on your waking studies, Ms. Planet!"

Jeune hung her head, her cheeks hot from embarrassment.

Her class carried on, with a lecture on wands and the theoretical principles of magic. At the end of the lecture, Mrs. Arete announced that she would be handing back the grades from the quiz they had taken last week.

Jeune's stomach twisted. She knew she hadn't studied enough because she had been in the garden focused on the new bulbs her mum



had put next to the Frillow's Fringe plants.

Mrs. Arete dropped the paper onto Jeune's desk. "As mentioned, you may want to spend more time on your philosophy and history studies, Jeune."

The letter grades in witch school were different from regular schools. But Jeune knew the ram's head circled in black was only one above the worst grade you could get. Her chest felt heavy. She didn't know why she couldn't find significance in Magical Philosophy. Jeune gathered up her backpack and headed outside. She still had to get to Madame Koshka's Herbatorium.

The herb shop was one of her favourite places to go. She had helped her mum shop for ingredients there since she was a little girl.

Jeune made her way from the school yard onto the cobblestone street. People were still crowding around as the rain began to fall. As she reached the sidewalk, she admired the bright white window frames of the shop as their panes sparkled. The displays were full of glass jars and steel buckets overflowing with dried herbs, plants, preserved creatures, and blooming succulents. The bell above the door chimed as she entered the shop.

"Hi Madame Koshka!" Jeune shouted, knowing that she was usually at the back rummaging for her weekly orders.

Jeune waited for a moment and Madame Koshka's head appeared from the back of the shop. Madame Koshka was very thin, with straight silver-gray hair. Her nose was sharp with large round spectacles that sat on the tip.

"Oh, Jeune." Her voice was slightly raspy, but pleasant and familiar. "I didn't hear you come in, dear," she said, aligning some jars on her way toward the counter. "And how was school today?"

Gripping her backpack, Jeune remembered the poorly graded test. "It was okay.... I brought a list from my mum." Jeune handed

the crumpled piece of parchment to Madame Koshka. She pinched the side of her glasses, looking closely at the list.

"Ahh, your first spell crafting I see, now that is something." She smiled and peered over her glasses as they slid down her nose. "I remember your mother's first crafting like it was yesterday." Madame Koshka gathered up the jars and tins that were necessary and pulled out some parchment paper. She folded the paper into tiny envelopes for each ingredient. The silver scoops shimmered under the lamp light as she delicately filled each one. Her movements were graceful. Jeune admired her craftsmanship.

She pressed the round golden buttons on the register, and the faded numbers spun to \$17.00. "That's seventeen dollars, dear."

Jeune pulled out her felted coin pouch and shuffled some change onto the counter.

"Thank you, Madame Koshka." Jeune blushed, excited about her purchase, but nervous to bring her test home to her mother. She lifted the envelopes carefully and placed them inside her jacket pocket.

Madame Koshka nodded and smiled. "Take care now, and welcome to the world of spell crafting."

Jeune's heart fluttered with excitement. She reached for the door handle, hearing the muffled chime of the bell as she stepped outside. It was dark now, and the concrete was wet from the rain. With her hand pressed against the envelopes in her pocket, Jeune hurried home.



"Hi Mum, I'm home..." Jeune called reluctantly into the quiet cabin.

Unbundling her layers, she noticed a warming glow that filled the room. The wood-burning stove was blazing, and the kettle was on a low simmer. Her mother entered from the hallway.

"Hey Jeune-bug, how was your day?" her mother cooed.

Forgetting about her philosophy class for a moment, Jeune remembered the celebrations in the streets. "Oh, the herbs were so fresh, and everybody was out celebrating!"

"Hmmm, that is exciting. And how was school?"

"Oh...um, it was alright."

"That doesn't sound convincing."

"I didn't do so well on my philosophy test, Mum." Jeune handed the branded paper to her mother.

"Hmmm...."

"I just don't find it interesting, Mum! I love plants and gardening and growing new things. Why do I have to learn about a bunch of old boring stuff?"

Jeune's mother put the paper down and went silent. Jeune shifted uncomfortably. After a moment, her mother spoke softly.

"Did you happen to get those ingredients I asked for?"

Though still worried about her mother's reaction to the test, Jeune felt excited when she remembered the envelopes in her jacket pocket. Calming herself with a breath, she held the envelopes out to her mother.

"I know your birthday isn't for a couple more days...."

Jeune's stomach was flipping, anticipating her mum's next words.

"But why don't I share the stories of these special ingredients with you?"

Jeune couldn't believe it. It was time. Time to learn about these incredible plants, and time to learn about spell crafting!

"Time is a very fragile and wondrous thing." Her mother went over to the stove and gathered up the large clam shell she used to mix herbs for her spells. "It is to be cherished with each day we get. And with time, comes

history, Jeune." Her mother was sincere, but spoke softly.

"History is the story of where we came from, our families, our traditions, and our spells. It's what makes us who we are today." She paused and gently glided the envelopes between her fingers. "Aging can be a scary thing, but it also allows us rite of passage and a chance to grow into who we are going to become."

Jeune listened intently. She was deeply interested in where these earthly seeds and plants came from, and she was overwhelmingly happy to be learning from her mother.

Her mother gently tore the edge of the first envelope and poured the contents into the shell. Little round combs of wax fell from the parchment, and Jeune watched as they rolled around.

"This is Brilldebund's Bringle Wax." She gently tossed the pieces. "This ingredient was originally discovered in the deep black forests of Gorvay. A Bringle is a magical creature that delves within these forests. They are round, balding creatures with long arms that drag upon the ground and large feet that make them very fast and hard to catch. One powerful witch managed to catch one and began studying the colony of this species."

Jeune was so fascinated with the story, she could feel goosebumps trail up her spine and spread onto her forearms.

"Her name was Beatrice Brilldebund. In her studies, she found that their ear wax could heal any wound." Her mother tipped the shell against a pot on the wood stove and let the pieces tumble in.

Jeune was silent. She didn't want to miss a single word. Picking up the second envelope, her mother opened the carefully folded flap. The contents clicked as her mother poured the envelope into the mixture.

"These are Eugene's Noojoo Beans. Eugene

Eurlure was a powerful sorcerer from the early 1900s, who studied Noojoo magic. This foreign practice studied the plants and herbs from the deserts in Argonika. He had the largest greenhouse in witch history. It was filled with all types of plants, some that were even carnivorous. His greenhouse was where he perished. His experiments would put him in many dangerous situations, but he left behind a hybrid bean plant. The bean seedlings blossom into a giving plant that will never die. You can trim it down, but it will continue to grow in any climate.

"These seedlings have been a staple in spellcraft due to their longevity. They hold the power of a spell in place, so that it can last a very long time."

Leaning forward, her nose on the edge of the pot, Jeune marveled at the tiny pieces of history.

Her mother tipped the shell against the pot and the beans dropped in.

The next envelope was puffier than the others. Her mother held it delicately and used a letter opener to cut precisely along the top edge. She lightly brushed the fluffy bundle from the package. It was a blend of pods of green and stems of gold.

Jeune's eyes sparkled in the firelight.

"This is Oaken's Oatstraw." Her mother gently rolled the green pods between her fingers. "Ogfield Oaken was an old farmer witch who lived a simple life almost free of magic. He loved living off the grid and raised many magical creatures on his farm. His oatstraw fields were as bright as gold. This oatstraw carries the power of the sun. Basking in the sun's rays all day, Ogfield learned how to harbour this power and used it to fuel his farm." Her mother's hand swayed over the shell, and Jeune could hear the straw rustle against her fingertips.

"If you burn this in your wood stove, the fire will glow a bright yellow hue into the night." She grabbed the coiled handle on the stove door and pried it open. The flame was settling on top of the coals. Her mother tossed one of the pods inside, and Jeune had to squint to shield her eyes from its blinding light. Her mother closed the door, and the room had a peaceful halo of yellow surrounding the walls.

Jeune felt a warming comfort from the light as her mother reached for the last envelope. The contents had stained through the parchment like a wet tea pouch. Her mother tore open the bottom of the damp paper. Jeune leaned in to smell the chunks that fell. They smelled earthy and damp, like freshly turned soil in the forest after rain.

"This is Mildred's Mulch." Her mother gently swirled the shell back and forth in her hand, tousling the pieces. "This was the very first ingredient used in spell crafting history." Jeune took a deep inhale. The fragrance of the pieces whirled around the room.

"Hundreds of years ago, Mildred Malachite discovered the power of the earth. When forest fires would subside, the rubble that lay behind glimmered in the moonlight. She would gather handfuls of the charcoaled remains and boil them into a tea. She discovered that the remains could send you on journeys in your dreams. She could travel through time and meet people on planes of existence that were untouchable in our world. Mildred was also the first female witch to be burned for her practices. A ceremony is held on the day of her death every year to commemorate her life and her incredible discovery." Her mother closed her eyes for a moment. "She died the way she lived, among the ashes."

Jeune bowed her head.

"Our people have spent centuries studying, learning, and growing from their surroundings,

so that we can live the way we do today.” Her mother’s voice trembled. “It is important to respect and honour the legacies left behind and continue to craft with these timeless ingredients. Cultural background, time, and place blur to create a colony of witches united in our practices. It is with great love that we cherish this history and pass it on so that others may learn the value of growth and change.”

Jeune pressed herself into her mother’s arms. The shawl her mother was wearing wrapped around her like a cocoon. Tears of joy streamed down her face. She was touched by the history of these powerful ingredients. The appreciation she felt for what her people had accomplished was overwhelming.

Her mother cradled Jeune’s head in her arms, looking toward the window. “See, Jeune-bug? Philosophy and history are the most important part of being a witch. Our ingredients, plants, and new practices come from the time before. To learn the old is to strengthen the new.”

Jeune wiped the tears from her face into the sleeve of her sweatshirt. “I understand now, Mum.” Jeune felt a strong connection with her mum, and finally understood the importance that philosophy had in the past and in her magical future.

Jeune gathered her things and with one last smell of the cauldron headed to bed, knowing she was fortunate to be learning about her culture, old and new.

POETRY | John Grey

THE SPEEDING WOMAN

She'll be dead in a week, a month.
She's driving herself toward the reaper,
foot hard on the accelerator,
her body popping with pills.

The rising sun is an illusion.
She's not barreling triumphant
toward the coming dawn.
That has to be another high up ahead.

Super-flat and calling out to her...
it's that kind of road, that
kind of distance between
who she is and what she regrets.
Like listening to friends
who turned out to be acquaintances.

Now, the phone calls are no help.
The hugs don't work.
Nor the doctor's warning.
Her boyfriend's advice.
Where's her pusher when she really needs him?

Engine racing, gas flaming...not to worry,
he's in the details with all her other devils.



LITERARY FICTION | Nessa Pullman
THE "AHA" MOMENT

She always wondered when she'd have that miraculous, life-changing "aha" moment. She'd seen her sister have it just a few years ago when she chose travelling over college. She'd seen her best friend have it when she finally dumped her washed-up boyfriend to self-discover her own worthiness. And she'd read extensively about Oprah's recurring, magical, ground-breaking insights. These shifts always seemed to bring such abundance to their lives. Like you had been sleepwalking your entire life until you reached this moment, and then suddenly it was like a whole new world was out there, full of possibilities and endless wonder.

But when was her time? It was 2015 and she was twenty-five years old now—officially a quarter of a century—why hadn't it happened to her yet? Wasn't it time? Did her psyche have to reach a certain level of maturity to be able to handle it? In her heart, she knew she was ready. She had been preppin' and prunin' that thirsty little soul of hers just *waiting* for the moment to happen. Concocting a plan, she read all the books in the self-help section at the library, attended early morning yoga classes, and even embarked on the task of learning self-guided meditation. But no matter what she did, it just didn't happen. She was really starting to worry now: her life seemed to be flying by and she could feel herself running out of time. Living an empowering, satisfying, and full life with the time she had left was all that she longed for.

"What's it supposed to feel like anyways?" she asked herself on days it seemed as though a colossal amount of time had passed her by. "Is it comparable to getting a new haircut? Baptism? Losing your virginity?" From all the books she read, the remarkable "aha" moment

felt like a transitional and spiritual re-birth. "How the hell am I supposed to know what that feels like? I don't even remember what it felt like being born for the *first* time!"

Nostalgia fills her mind as she combs through the years behind her. Did anything make her feel close to that? Maybe it had happened already but she just wasn't aware? Were there any mind-blowing epiphanies throughout the years she had accidentally missed? What about that time she chose to stay home to do some spring cleaning while all her friends went to Portland over the break? Nope. That wasn't anything even mildly pivotal to her existence.

In the effortless days when she was just a little girl, time just seemed to move so slowly. She was never worried about reaching a certain level of spiritual awakening, to deem herself worthy of living a fulfilling life. No, she just played, danced, and did whatever made her little self happy. She was living her life in a way that felt good, that felt natural. Oh, *those* were the days! Why was she so preoccupied with something that hadn't even happened yet? Forcing upon herself a change that wasn't ready to come? She wondered how she had arrived at this point. How she had drifted so far from that adolescent girl who spent her time dancing and laughing her days away? Like the fearless summers spent fishing at Lake Erie with her dad and uncles. Reminiscing, she's realized just how much happier she was back then, when time didn't hold any power over her. But how can she get her younger self back?

Her fear of passing time had impeded her from being the happy little girl she used to be. Time didn't matter to her then, and it shouldn't matter to her now. So what if she never took a spontaneous backpacking trip around the world, or went on a soul-searching spiritual journey post break-up, or quit her job and moved to another city? Those weren't her

stories; they were theirs. She could now see she had wasted so much time trying to live a life that wasn't hers, trying to tell a story that she didn't know. So much precious time spent worrying about something that just didn't belong to her!

While she was so focused on creating a spiritual shift within herself, she was denying the life that was begging for her to start living. Full of wild, wonderful stories of her own. It was just then, without even realizing, she slipped so effortlessly into her very own, first ever, "aha" moment.



Green sat in the flickering lamplight of his bedroom, squinting into the harsh glare of his computer monitor. Through weary eyes, the young man could see flecks of dust drifting through his vision, reflected white against the monitor. The words beyond them were becoming unfocused, and the blinking cursor taunted him. He'd spent the day working on scholarship applications without much success. Even with the threat of deadlines looming over his head, everything he wrote came out sounding phoney and forced. He pushed himself back in his chair and set his glasses onto the desk with a heavy sigh. Just beyond the window, the full moon watched, hanging in silence.

When the phone rang at 9:14 pm, Green glanced towards the caller ID and frowned. Briefly, he considered ignoring it but thought better of the idea. Ilya would not have taken the hint.

Answering the call, he pressed the receiver to his ear and caught the tail end of a muffled conversation. From the sounds of it, Ilya must have been at his girlfriend's house. She was more than audible in the background, telling him to say hi for her.

Ilya skipped the greetings and got straight to the point. "You think about it?"

"No." Green's voice came out flat, tired. He gave one more glower to the offending computer screen before standing to pace the room. The space felt smaller than it usually did.

"'No' as in you haven't thought about it, or 'no' as in you're definitely not going to prom?" Ilya went on, unsympathetic to Green's soured mood.

Green felt his frown deepen. With a shuddering breath, the tension left him, and he

muttered a terse, "Don't know."

Ilya didn't seem satisfied with the answer. "C'mon, dude! This is like some once in a lifetime thing or whatever. Maybe chill out for once and do something fun?"

Patience steadily thinning, Green refrained from telling the other how little excitement he had for the event. It'd just be like any other high school party or dance: meaningless in a few years, an overall waste of time. He knew this, but a vague sense of doubt rolled over him and shook his resolve.

"Whatever. I'll think about it some more."

"Cool. See you then—oh! And Kyla says 'hi.' "

With a click, Green was left alone again with the accusatory blinking of the cursor. He still had textbooks to read and practice problems to do. His shoulders sagged as he slid down into his chair and got back to work.



The next morning, Green fell easily into autopilot, winding through freshmen who had nothing better to do than stand in the middle of every hallway on his way to class. Each day seemed more monotonous than the last, but he took comfort in routine. Flipping through his agenda once or twice throughout the morning, Green read and reread the notes meticulously penned in multicoloured inks. Black for homework, blue for tests, red for application dates. Those he could handle. They were a breadcrumb trail along the one-way road to university success.

Ilya showed up late to English, holding a coffee and asking to borrow a pen. He waited until after receiving it to tease Green with the information that even Blue had gotten a date to prom. When the only response Ilya got was a sharp kick to the chair, he laughed loud enough for the teacher to shoot them both a scathing look. Green then watched as the other spent the rest of class happily buried in his notebook,

wasting ink to scribble what looked like cats in the margins. At the ring of the bell, they parted ways once again. Green didn't get his pen back until lunchtime.

They spent the hour like they always did, holed up in one of the school's many fire escapes. Despite the stale air, Green appreciated the seclusion. He ate his box of leftovers and watched with mild fascination as Ilya finished off a bag of gummy sharks while texting cutesy stickers to Kyla.

It was halfway through lunch when the door to their little enclave flew open and Éloi Blue appeared—out of breath but no more unkempt than always—with an arm full of loose papers. Green was quiet as he rattled out a sheepish laugh and crouched to shuffle the papers into his timeworn messenger bag.

"Sorry I'm late!" Blue chirped. His eyes were bright despite the dark circles that bruised his lower lids. "I overslept and missed my bus, but it wasn't all bad. There was a nice lady at the bus stop, and she let me pet her dog!"

Green only half listened. He'd heard countless variations of this story over the years of their friendship and knew how Blue could easily ramble on for hours if uninterrupted.

"You can copy my notes." Green pushed his bag towards the other.

He was taken aback when Blue turned a soft shade of pink and replied, "I already got them from Cerise."

Green pointedly ignored the sly look on Ilya's face as he pulled back his bag with a muttered, "Whatever." He assumed that Cerise was Blue's previously-alluded-to prom date and, as if reading his thoughts, Blue suddenly perked up. He turned towards Green with wide, expectant eyes. Green was made an insect, pinned for display on someone else's living room wall.

"You're going to prom, right?" It didn't feel

like a question.

"Yeah."



Pacing the worn carpet of his bedroom once again, Green replayed his lapse of judgement and its aftermath in his mind. He remembered the look Ilya had given him, and the way Blue's face had lit up, and felt a little faint. He knew he was making this a bigger deal than it needed to be, but it didn't stop the developing headache. All he needed to do was rearrange his study schedule, to rewrite a few days in his agenda. It was simple, yet the crossed-out passages looked so ugly compared to what they were before.

The worn blazer lying crumpled on his bed didn't help. His mother, home from working overtime again, had been ecstatic when he'd told her he was going to prom. Despite his protests, she'd insisted on fishing out his father's old jacket for him to wear and, not wanting to waste her efforts, he'd promised to try it on.

Green slipped into the garment and stood, scrutinizing his reflection in the mirror, blinds drawn against the waning moon's probing eyes as he squinted to see without his glasses. It was a youthful version of his father that stared back at him, complete with brooding eyes, thick brows, and perpetual frown. Despite working from home, his father often seemed more like the shadow man that lived down the hall than a parental figure. As a child, Green often found bits and pieces of the man littered around the house in the form of broken liquor bottles and cigarette butts. Lately, those had been replaced by tea strainers and sleeping pills.

The jacket was a little cozy around the middle and long in the sleeves, but it fit better than Green would've wanted. On an impulse, he lifted an arm to sniff at the fabric, but all he could smell was detergent and the sweat of his

own palms.

"A chip off the old block," his mother would've said had she been in the room. She'd always felt the need to reassure him that his father was trying. It left a bad taste in his mouth, but Green had to admit that he wasn't entirely innocent either. Maybe the desire for solitude was a hereditary trait. If that was the case, then Green supposed overreacting to simple problems must've been as well. Faintly, he wondered if his father had gone to prom. Probably not. He hadn't even graduated.

Green breathed a lot easier once he'd taken the jacket off. His mother looked surprised when he told her it didn't fit.



On the night of prom, as the sky turned rosy, Green found himself facing the mirror once again.

His books lay untouched, neatly stacked on his nightstand, as he buttoned up a dusty olive dress shirt complete with black dress pants and shoes. He combed his hair, flipped through his agenda once more, and asked his mother for help with his tie. She'd taken the evening off for this occasion, and the glowing pride on her face kept him rooted as she reached for the camera. Even his father made a guest appearance, his hair a lot greyer than Green remembered. Green waited for him to say something, but he didn't.

Prom was held in the school gymnasium. Bypassing his mother's offer to drive him there, Green chose to walk with hopes that the balmy weather and familiar road would clear the cotton in his limbs. It did not. A lump of dread grew in his stomach as he checked in and took his seat at one of the grey-clothed tables near the back. The theme seemed to be "lunar landing," with hanging lights and painted banners that simulated stars and space dust. For Green, the word that came to mind as he

observed the cardboard Earth stuck to the wall was "tacky." As more people flooded in, he already longed for home.

Dinner was fine. He watched Ilya flick his peas at a squealing Blue, and Kyla wave her hands at her friend, Callie, seemingly in a heated argument about flip phones. To Green, their smiles looked effortless as they enjoyed their time, unbothered by the ebbing sunlight. Among them, he felt out of place, but as he made polite conversation with the group, Green noticed Cerise sitting at a different table.

When the dishes were finally cleared and the lights dimmed, the others dispersed, heading towards either the dance floor or desserts. Green watched as they left him behind, remaining in his seat on the excuse that he was feeling sick. It wasn't too far from the truth.

He stayed for as long as he felt was polite, and by the time he looked back up from his phone, the crowd had thinned considerably. He scanned the people that remained and didn't see Ilya or Kyla, but he did find Blue looking somewhat uncomfortable by the punch bowl. Green thought about leaving without saying goodbye but decided against it. After gathering his things, he made his way across the dance floor and took note of the glassy look in Blue's eyes.

"You ok?" Green asked when he was within earshot.

Blue seemed surprised to see him. "Oh! Um—yeah. I'm good."

"Right." Green couldn't help but notice that there was something odd about his movements. He peered towards the cup in the other's hand but Blue pulled back his arm, nearly spilling its contents.

"Whatever," Blue mumbled, shuffling his feet. "You want to get out of here?"

On their way to the exit, Green noticed Cerise dancing with a girl he recognized from Calculus.



The evening air outside was thick with the smell of overripe vegetation, and just starting to cool as the sun's corona kissed the horizon goodnight. Blue still clutched the plastic cup as he plodded across the patchy field towards the bleachers on the far end. Green followed behind, hands tucked in his pockets as they climbed the steps and settled on the top bench among peeling paint and splintered wood. A lull fell over the two like a blanket, too warm for the summertime.

"What happened to Cerise?" Green took it upon himself to break the unwelcomed silence.

Blue just shrugged, taking a swig of his drink before setting it down beside him. "Nothing. I guess—"

Green watched as he fidgeted with the worn edges of his shirt.

"I guess I got excited, and just saw what I wanted to see," Blue finished, eyes a little watery. As he talked, Green noticed a pungent smell coming from his direction. He recognized it, clinging to the sleeves of a conjured image of his father when his hair was still black. Someone must've spiked the punch.

Green swallowed against the familiar ache in his chest. Not wanting to let the silence breathe, he blurted, "Do you regret coming?" It was a question he'd been asking himself throughout the night. Was he wasting his time?

Blue seemed taken aback. "Well, I mean—." He wiped a hand across his face before continuing. "It didn't go as planned, but it's not all bad. If this is still about Cerise, I'm glad she's having fun. Spending time with friends is always nice... And you're here! So that's another positive." Blue turned to him with a worried look. "I don't want this to be a bad memory."

"I guess...." Green wasn't entirely convinced, but Blue just hummed and shook his head as if clearing it.

Green watched as a shy grin grew on the other's face. Their shoulders bumped as Blue leaned into him, voice becoming hushed. "Hey, I wanted to ask. Why were you so scared of this anyway?"

Scared? Green wasn't scared. He wanted Blue to know this, but the words stuck in his throat as their eyes met. He didn't want to have this conversation here. He wanted to go home to the safety of stacked notebooks and multicoloured pens: things he could understand.

As stars blinked awake against the darkening sky above, Green's skin crawled, trapped under a thousand clinical white eyes. They watched him, a silent council waiting for a believable answer. He was horrified when the burning in his chest rose to his face and all of the anxiety he'd been suppressing became too much to hold, bubbling up as his breathing hitched.

In a few years, none of this would mean anything anyway. They were graduating. He'd go off to university and his friends would all move on, forget about each other, and he'd never see them again. He'd never see Blue again. Would it even matter?

The unspoken fears he'd been trying to forget hung above his head, a sharp blade waiting to fall at the pull of a lever by unseen hands. In a few years, he'd scoff at what an idiot he'd been to put so much thought into this, but, in the moment, the pain in his chest was a festering infection, a product of neglect. His vision became blurred by frustrated tears. He'd never been good with words. Maybe that was why his father also preferred to stay in his room, but Green didn't want to make the same mistakes.

"I just—" Green choked, "I didn't want to make this a bigger deal than it needed to be." He wasn't sure if that was the right way to phrase it, but Blue nodded as if he understood and that was enough. The blade that hovered

was still there, still menacing, but Green supposed that when it inevitably dropped, there'd just be a new one to take its place. Maybe that could be okay too if he kept an eye on it. He'd just have to figure it out when it happened.

Under the thinning crescent of moonlight that remained, Blue rested his head on Green's shoulder, and while he wasn't looking, Green poured his drink out onto the dying grass below.

THE ONE AND ONLY ORIGINAL

She shuffled
through the papers,
wiping away
the detritus of her many years
and took out
the beloved photo.
In her seven-year-old eyes
was eternity,
the past already
painful and beautiful,
the future
destined to be
complicated,
filled with the
doubts and disappointments
we all share.
But in the tilt of
her head
a defiance,
a strength that always mystified her
as much as others,
but that served her
as well at five,
when her father would quietly enter her room
when no one else
was home,
as it did
at fourteen
when he died,
and again when
with her own children
about that same age
she came within
a hair's breadth
of altering the future
irrevocably—
an impulsive smashing of glass
revealing seductive edges—
but settled for something

less catastrophic
for their sakes.
At all these milestones
and the many forgotten to time
there remained the black-and-white
school photo
from grade one.
It still looked new.
She would take it out
from that drawer
at home
look into her eyes
and note the angle of the head
the straight back
the Mona Lisa smile
with that ambiguous mouth
and seek
solace,
confirmation,
inspiration of some sort,
to find something
in that touchstone
for uncertain times;
the original her
at first pulling
now pushing
her forward
as only someone
bound to you
from the beginning
can do.

THE MARRIAGE

The clock strikes 1 a.m.
It's 2017. Moonlight. In the next room, a steady dun dun di. Dun dun di. Dun dun di. Evan's fingers strike the keys of his piano. He wants to get his timing just right. And me, I'm thinking.

I wonder, after everything that's happened, what this time has meant to my dad. These 23 years. Without love. Or with, was it with love?

In 1986, he was 22. They had met through friends. She had long blonde hair and dark brown eyes. She was quiet and mild-mannered, wife material. He obsessed over her, he scared off all the others; he staked his claim. On her birthday, he filled her bedroom with balloons and stole her heart.

Then I think about what they could have meant to her, my mom, these 23 years. Without love. Or with, could it be with love?

In 1994, she was 27 years old. They were married in a little Catholic church, with me as their flower girl. Then they honeymooned in Disneyland. She was happy. At home his work didn't pay well, but she wouldn't mind taking on a few extra expenses herself. She'd made her own little family, a husband, a daughter, and eventually, a son. They moved into a little white house with blue trim and a lush green yard.

The clock, 1:16 a.m.

23 years, and what have they meant to us, the children?

2017, I'm 25 years old. I love my dog and the sunset. And sleep, I love sleep. What have they meant to me, these 23 years?

It's 2007, I'm hiding in the shadows. She cries, "You're sick! No excuse for a Dad! I hate you, they hate you!" The moonlight through the window on his face makes his nose look

long. A self-satisfied smile. From his mouth, inaudible whispers. I creep out from the darkness, straining my ears. I'm waiting for a familiar sign, the sound of a chair being tossed, or the ringing of broken glass. I'll beg them to stop, I'll try to be their voice of reason. I won't cry. Maybe tonight, they'll listen.

Often I wonder if they can even hear me when I intervene. When I plead with them for a night of peace. Or could it be that I'm just the shadow from a mistake they made 15 years ago? I want them to know how much I love them. So I wait. In the next room, a steady dun dun di. Dun dun di. Dun dun di.

Now in 2010, my mother is sprawled out on the floor. She's crying, exhausted. Through sobs she asks, "How could he?" Mascara mixes with tears and paints her face a black blur. And they get on my clothes, her black tears. I hold her head and nod my agreement, but no words come. I can't cry, only listen. Her tears last a little while longer, then she takes a few pills. A couple minutes pass, and she slips into a somber sleep. We don't live in the little white house anymore.

Our new home is small and dark. I go to my bedroom. A tear of my own finally streams down my cheek and gets on my clothes. I'm sprawled on the floor, exhausted. I know I won't sleep tonight; I'll listen for the subtle sounds of her snoring. And when I can't quite hear them, I'll stand outside of her room for a while and wait. Often I fear that she's taken too many pills. I'll probably do this several more times throughout the night, this waiting game. Waiting and listening.

Sometimes it feels like a nightmare, but at these moments I remind myself of what things were like before. Tents pitched in the summer months, not too far from the outlets for mom's hair dryer and makeup. September, my birthday, themed parties with all of my smiling friends. December, Christmas, an artificial tree

covered in lights and sentimental ornaments. February, flowers for mom, and purple-packaged peanut butter chocolates. Every month gave us something new to celebrate.

The clock, 1:39 a.m.

It's 2017, Evan's 19 years old. He loves his cat, his skateboard, and the wind in his hair. So much hair. And sleep, he loves sleep. What could these years have meant to him?

In 2008, there's yelling in the other room. I check on him, he's sitting on his floor, flipping through a magazine. My room is further from the noise, so we make him a bed out of pillows. Four on the ground and one for his head. We can still hear them in the other room, so we watch *Ghostbusters*. Movies that would make us laugh, those were our favourite.

Now it's 2010, and there's yelling again. Evan could always hear them well through the hole in his door, the one that dad made with his fist one night mom wouldn't stop crying. He's too old now for pillows on the ground, so he sits on his floor and flips through a magazine. Usually, it's only mom who yells. Her cries torn up with pain. Dad only taunts from the corner. But, when he hears dad's voice perk-up above a whisper, he puts down the magazine. He opens the door and peers through the shadows. He's brave, but when he sees a vase being hurtled at the window, he backs up into his room, confused and terrified.

From my own room I can hear as his fist makes a hole in the wall, one to call his own. Then he sprawls out on the floor, exhausted. He's told me that he often wonders about love and what it means to be a dad. "I don't really know," he'd say, "maybe our dad just isn't sure either."

He would worry when dad would disappear for days on end, so I'd tell him to focus his thoughts on simpler times. Camping with mom, and learning to swim in the shallow parts of the water. His drawings in pre-k of

knights with swords and shields, surrounded by crayon trees. And May, his birthday, the pizza and bouncy castles and all of his friends.

Now he's in high school and he loves to play music. The guitar, and the piano. And the piano. And the piano. Dun dun di. Dun dun di. Dun dun di.

Now it's 2017, and the clock strikes 2 a.m.

There are holes in the walls, and t-shirts with black tear stains. Yet, there are memories that remain of beautiful days, and if we let them, they come creeping out of the shadows and linger with us for a while. Then they're swept away again, by the hands of time, and all we can do is wait. Wait and wonder. Wonder at the silent strength of time; at its resilience and its vulnerability. At its unrelenting effects on life, and on love.

So I think, and he plays. He wants to get his timing just right. Dun dun di. Dun dun di. Dun dun di.

SCIENCE FICTION | Truly Hunter

TIME WATCH

August 5th, 2033, 12:02 p.m.:

My lab is covered in scattered papers, and the floor is carpeted in glass from a shattered beaker. The heavy stench of sulfur hangs in the air, but I am not concerned. I have done it. I have created the impossible. A device that allows the user to travel to any date and time in history. An absurd concept, I am aware. Reading my own words, it still does not seem real. My colleagues have mocked my ambitions mercilessly for years. I have lost friends and loved ones, all in my single-minded pursuit of this very day. It has all been worth it. In three days' time, I will conduct the final solo test of the device—the Time Watch—before presenting it to my colleagues. I am a God among men.

August 8th, 2033, 7:33 a.m.:

My contact in Combat Development Sector 2F assures me that he has provided the best and most efficient equipment available. He built me a field pack with rations and other supplies, but I do not know what many of the items are for, and I am sure I will not need most of them. I asked him to include a manual, but I doubt he had time to do so. I have dressed in the provided gear: a black long-sleeved shirt, brown combat jacket, field mesh (just a vest with pockets, if you ask me), brown combat pants, and black combat boots. From what I have seen of the kit so far, I am confident that I can survive if the experiment is unsuccessful. Statistically, however, the chance of failure is so infinitesimal that I am unconcerned.

Same Day, 7:50 a.m.:

I have secured the Time Watch to my wrist using the Poly Strap (ver. 6.2), synthesized in lab 19 September 29th, 2033—referenced on page 544 of my previous journal (#21).

The poly-siloxane structure is comfortable, lightweight, highly flexible, and practically indestructible. Today is the first field test of this technology (patent pending).

Same Day, 7:55 a.m.:

The Watch is set for August 17th, 1969, Bethel, New York, during the event Woodstock. I have done immense research regarding this time period, and I feel certain this will be a safe spawn point for the test. Most of the town will be gathered in one location; hence, I will be able to observe a great deal while remaining unnoticed. I am optimistic about the result of the test. I believe I will be able to get in and out in a matter of minutes. As referenced on page 134 of this journal (#22), I was able to complete a round trip once before. If today's test goes just as efficiently as the last, I will arrive back in this precise spot at exactly 8:00 a.m. on this day after having traveled back in time.

Bon voyage.

Unknown Date and Time, Day 1:

There is nothing but dark green ferns, foliage, and trees with trunks as thick as my torso. They tower two or three hundred metres above, and seem to lean over my head as they ridicule me. The whole world here smells like moss and rich soil—it is an earthy, dark brown smell that permeates every single thing. I believe I now reek of dirt, and I have only been here a couple of hours.

I have been able to track the passing of time using the sun, but I do not know what day or year I have arrived in. Upon re-entry of the time space continuum, the Poly Strap disintegrated. The bio engineered poly-filaments must have broken down as they passed through the re-oxygenation barrier. Due to this unanticipated complication, the Watch was damaged. It dropped from my wrist and made contact with a large section of stone. The



screen is severely cracked, but I am confident I will be able to repair it as soon as I set up camp. Nothing here is precisely as I expected. I have not seen another human, or any sign of civilization, since spawning. But I am confident that, given enough time, I will be more than capable of completing the test.

Hour 3, Daylight, Day 1:

My hand shakes as I write this. I cannot seem to catch my breath. My trembling body is drenched in sweat, and I can smell my own odor. The predators nearby will soon smell my fear. I have lost the Time Watch. It slipped from my pocket somewhere between the spawn point and my current location, 6 km northwest of the spawn point. Thankfully, I have been able to create a deep trail of footprints in the loose black soil, which will allow me to precisely retrace my steps. I will now search for the Watch. As I write this entry, my nerves are relaxing. There is a good chance I will find the Watch before sundown.

Hour 19 (approx.), Early Morning, Day 2:
I am already beginning to lose track of time. The celestial bodies in this time period are excruciatingly different from those in my own. It is impossible for me to tell my latitude and longitude. If my suspicions are correct, I have gone much farther back in time than I intended. I still have not found the Watch. I will continue to search; however, it is difficult to avoid the predators that hunt in this forest. So far I have been able to evade them using my limited tracking abilities to determine their hunting patterns, but soon I will have to sleep.

Hour 27ish, Afternoon, Day 2:

If I ever see my mother again, I will tell her how much I love her. I will tell her she is a saint of a woman for putting up with my miserable foolishness. I never thought I would say this. I am not an affectionate man, but I miss the feeling of her arms around me. I am beginning

to doubt I will ever find the Watch.

Sometime in the evening, Day 2:

The jungle here is packed with verdant ferns and strange oversized, pointed blooms in vivid shades of orange, pink, red, and yellow. Making my way through this dense growth is proving to be more difficult than I could ever have prepared for. The machete I was provided has already dulled to the point of uselessness, and I am beginning to believe I will die here. My chest is tight enough that it restricts my breathing, and I have been unable to move from my current location for more than an hour. If I continue to allow my fear to keep me immobile, the predators will ultimately locate me.

Early morning, Day 3:

I have not slept. Is it becoming morning? I think so. I have crawled far up into a tree. My balance is no good. I cannot lay down and sleep. I heard the deep, reverberating rumble again. It came from inside the thick tangles of undergrowth below me. It has been tracking me.

Note: If I ever get back to the lab, remind Jose in Combat Development—bless his soul—to provide more than one extra pair of underwear in the future.

Soon my pen will run out of ink and I will be unable to continue my journaling. I can only pray that I find some form of civilization before that time comes. This journal is the only thing keeping me from going mad.

Unknown Date and Time, Day 3 or 4:

Dear God, if there is a God, please rescue me. Please allow me to return home. I am sorry I did not believe. I fear you now, God. If I survive, I will be your humble servant. Please God save m

(journal end)

LITERARY FICTION | Tim Migeon
JUST ONE LAST TIME

Forty recovering addicts have assembled for their bi-monthly group therapy session inside one of the common rooms of a government-run addiction treatment facility. The beat-up white walls of the room are peppered with scuffs and oily handprints, and the heavily-scratched grey laminate floor has a few stains that the janitor has been trying to get rid of. Both dusty white ceiling fans wobble, quietly twirling above everybody's heads. There aren't any windows, so the air is stale and has a faint aroma of body odor. A cheap, well-used wooden podium stands at the front of the room. The people sit in uncomfortable dark blue plastic chairs and quietly talk amongst themselves. There are a few close friends in the room, but most of them are just being polite.

The group's primary counselor is Melody Reeves. She's forty years old, has two teenaged kids, a brown short-haired Norwegian forest cat named Note, and wanted to be a professional musician as a kid. She's a recovering addict and has been sober for five years. Melody walks into the room, but nobody is surprised because they heard the distinctive jingle of her multicoloured bracelets. She's wearing her favorite red tie-dye t-shirt and her long hazelnut hair is in a ponytail with a matching tie-dye scrunchie. Despite her neon-green pants, her smile is the brightest thing in the room. She walks up to the podium and gathers everybody's attention by flailing her arms around. The room falls silent.

"Hello, everybody." Her voice is soft and full of joy. She quickly makes eye contact with as many people as possible.

"Hi, Melody!" The entire room responds at the same time.

"It's wonderful to see you all! I hope

everyone is enjoying life addiction-free. As you all know, we are still in the middle of the fentanyl crisis. Over the years, I've gotten to know quite a few fantastic people who sadly lived on the streets. These days I see fewer and fewer familiar faces. At first, I didn't think much of it and I'd think that maybe their lives turned around too. But looking back on it now, it saddens me to think that most of those wonderful human beings probably overdosed. No illegal substance bought on the street is safe from this horrible, terrifying, and evil infection. For the love of God, stay away from those killer cocktails. The number of dead keeps climbing and climbing without any end in sight. Nobody is untouchable, no source is pure, and no dealer has clean product. I can't scare you enough and I can't stress it enough." Melody scans the crowd hoping her words aren't falling on deaf ears. She eagerly smacks her hands down on the podium. "Anyhow, let's switch over to something more positive. It's Jim's one hundredth day sober!" She begins to clap and everybody in the room joins in.

Jim is sitting in the front row. Those sitting closest to him enthusiastically pat him on the back.

"Congratulations, Jim! He's prepared a speech for us and would like to read it. Jim, come on up!"

Jim walks up to the podium carrying a plastic bottle of water. He takes a slightly crumpled paper out of his pocket and places it on the podium next to his bottle. His grey, short-sleeved dress shirt and blue jeans are nicely ironed, his coal black hair freshly trimmed, and he has clearly shaved for the occasion. Jim Dorsey is twenty five years old, wears black metal framed glasses, listens to classical music, and wanted to be an astronaut as a kid. He is currently attending college because his mother doesn't charge him rent if he goes to school. His mother also finances

Jim's education with money that was supposed to have been a gift from his grandmother. Jim straightens out his speech, takes a deep breath, and clears his throat.

"For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jim Dorsey and I'm an addict." His breathing is shallow and voice raspy from years of smoking.

"Hi, Jim!" The entire room responds at the same time.

"I've been a drug addict for more than ten years now. I'm a victim of psychological abuse, emotional neglect, and manipulation. I suffer from multiple mental illnesses, which combine into a schizoaffective disorder. I also have an undiagnosed physical disorder that causes me chronic pain and crippling fatigue. It's not unusual for me to be bombarded by self-harming and suicidal thoughts. I've attempted suicide twice because the pain of being alive was too intense. I definitely don't want to die, but for whatever reason, suicide still seems like the most logical solution. I wrote this speech as part of my healing process, so here it goes." He clears his throat again and a smile takes over his face. He attempts to hide it with his hand.

"Go Jim!" one of his peers shouts.

"A hundred days!" another person yells. The room bursts into applause and Jim struggles to hold back tears of joy. He cracks open his bottle of water and takes a drink.

"After a decade of being an addict, I don't know how else to function, but I've had enough. I'm completely beyond sick and tired of being sick and tired. I've had enough of drowning my sorrows with alcohol, numbing my body with pain killers, and frying my brain with drugs. Enough of destroying myself and not being able to do anything to stop it. Enough of losing control and sabotaging every single attempt I make to fix what's broken. I've had too many opportunities disappear in front of my eyes, and too many people vanish along

with them.

"Unfortunately, self-sabotage is something that I know all too well. I can't identify whether it's subconscious or unconscious, but I know it when I see it. Not when it's happening of course, but shortly after, when my life collapses all around me. It's hard to explain why I say or do things that leave me with crippling regret and inwardly fixated rage. I've spent my entire life hating myself for reasons I still don't fully understand, and it takes every ounce of strength that I possess to keep from completely self-destructing." Jim drops his gaze as he scrutinizes both of his forearms. "I've got enough scars on my body and on my psyche to last a lifetime, yet I seem determined to add more and more as time goes on. Maybe it's because I just don't know any better, or maybe I only know I'm alive when I bleed. Maybe I secretly like the way it feels, or maybe I'm just broken." He nods his head slightly. He places his right hand on the back of his neck and rubs it while briefly eyeing the crowd. He grips the podium with both hands and his eyes dart from person to person. Everybody is making eye contact with him, looking eager to hear the rest of his speech.

"Maybe, I'm just broken." Jim stares blankly at his speech. He tilts his head back and gazes straight up at the fan directly above his head. A single tear rolls down his left cheek, and he quickly wipes it away. Jim glances in the direction of his audience and shakes his head. "I'm sorry, my thoughts are going completely off script here. My grandmother recently passed away at the age of ninety four and a half. She made me promise not to cry when she died, but that was my first tear. Dementia destroyed her over the last ten years and she'd been ready to die for twenty years. I won't go into detail about any of the numerous psychologically damaging things I experienced over the last four years while being forced to visit her three

to four times a week. My mother made me visit both of my dementia-riddled grandparents at the assisted living facility where neither of them would ever leave alive.” Jim takes off his glasses and drops them on the podium. He runs his hands from the back of his head down over his face. Sighing heavily, he rubs his eyes and puts his glasses back on. A small chuckle escapes his lips, and he shakes his head. “Oh, the stories I could tell. Sometimes I wonder why I’m an addict, but the more I think about it, the answers are right in front of me. Anyways, back to the speech.” Jim scans the sheet of paper, finds where he stopped, and clears his throat.

“It appears that my mind has desires of its own. Its goals aren’t that different from mine, but it’s clear, even to me, that those objectives have a sinister undertone. An undertone so vile, disturbing, and distracting that I can’t escape the overwhelming gravitational pull of the black hole located inside my head. It’s nestled so comfortably somewhere inside the obscure parts of my brain that I can’t consciously detect the re-wiring of circuitry or the misfiring of synapses. Like it is a program running in the background that I can’t shut off. What can I do? What can I say? I will just sabotage all the valuable things in my life anyway.” Jim’s defeated tone changes to one exploding with passion. His voice bellows as he emphasizes every word.

“This never-ending uphill struggle has stolen all my energy and left me powerless to fight back. The immense walls I’ve built around myself have only made it easier for the poisonous propaganda to circulate inside. Those negative messages are the only things that have any effect these days. The so-called positive information coming from outside those walls is met with fierce opposition because the positivity is hollow. Empty words spoken by two-faced people. They claim to be helping me, claim to be my friends, claim

to love me, but they’ve all disappeared along with their well wishes and statements of understanding. To be fair, I pushed everyone away.” Jim shakes his head. “But none of them tried to fight back.”

“That’s not entirely unbiased, so I’ll try again.” He grabs his water bottle and takes a sip. Beads of sweat form on his forehead, and he wipes them away with his forearm. “I blame the fact that I don’t care about anything and care about everything. I blame my inability to feel love and happiness, to have healthy coping mechanisms and move past traumatic events, and my failure to create goals and finish projects.

“I accuse my lack of experiencing closure, my out-of-control addictions, my disconnections from reality, my short-term memory loss, my self-harming tendencies, my lack of trust, my delusional beliefs, my psychotic breaks, my suicide attempts, my allergies, my asthma, my hopes, and my dreams. The constant pain interrupts my sleep and not sleeping affects my sensitivity to reality. I could go on and on about the nearly insurmountable obstacles in my path to recovery, but then we’d be here all day and I’ve already done enough complaining.”

He laughs as his passionate tone becomes calmer. “It’s becoming clear that I’m destined to be alone, by choice and by circumstance. All alone with my regrets, tainted thoughts, and delusional fantasies. At least this way I’ll be safer; nothing to lose, but everything to gain. God willing, I’ll never find myself in situations to sabotage again. I’ll never try to build relationships of any kind again. Never get high or get drunk again. Keep taking my medications even though I don’t think they help. Put out my resume and try to get a job even though I’m in no shape to work. I don’t know if it’s realistic or not, but I’ll make it in this world someday because a little hope can go a long way. With any luck, the pain will

go away with time, and I'll be able to live free of the heavy chains around me. Until then, I'll keep up the fight. Overlook my mistakes, attempt to heal my wounds, plan for the next one hundred healthier tomorrows, and then the next hundred after that. Thank you."

The room explodes with applause. Jim receives a standing ovation and a hug from Melody with tears streaming down her face. He shakes a few hands and gives a couple high fives on his way out of the room.

Jim walks outside the building for a breath of fresh air. It's a beautiful sunny day. An old yellow taxi drives by on the one-way street, as four crows burst out of a green dumpster across the street and into the air fighting over half a bagel. He takes a sip from his water bottle while engulfed in the taxi's exhaust fumes, then quickly heads back inside and grabs the bathroom key from the front desk. He walks down a hallway that has colourful inspirational posters of smiling people on the walls. He wishes he could rip them all down because he can feel the people silently judging him. Jim enters the bathroom, passing the bright yellow box mounted on the wall for used syringes. He winces as the unmistakable smell of bleach hits him like a brick wall. He stops in front of the dirty mirror above the single faucet sinks and fills up his nearly empty water bottle. He steps into one of the only two stainless steel stalls and slams the metal latch so hard that it echoes off the white tiled walls and into the hallway.

Jim places his water bottle on the black plastic toilet-paper dispenser and sits down without undoing his pants. He takes out his old grey glasses case from his right pants pocket and opens it, resting it on his thigh. Inside is a silver tablespoon, a worn out cobalt-blue jet lighter, a small cotton ball, and an unused capped syringe. From his other pocket he takes out a tiny plastic baggie stamped with multiple green dollar signs, scrutinizing it in the palm of

his hand. A smile erupts on Jim's face, though this time it's more genuine than the one he wore in front of the crowd. He is completely captivated by his actions as he carefully dumps the contents of the baggie onto the spoon and flicks the baggie to make sure it's empty. He uncaps the syringe and sucks up some water from his bottle, drowning the powder with it. He snatches the spoon into his left hand and grabs the lighter with his right. He places his thumb on the lighter's loose igniter push button. Jim hesitates for a split second and leans back against the toilet. His eyes study his surroundings as if he just woke up from a dream. He stares at the small foggy puddle and nods his head.



Jim died from a fatal dose of fentanyl. Jim isn't real, but the problem definitely is. Over 1,400 people died of an overdose in B.C. last year. If you or someone you know is suffering from addiction, please get help because it's not too late, until it's too late.

POETRY | Benjamin Longshot McFee

THE KILLING TIME

I know I've seen this once over
I know that I've seen this before.
It always began with one bad thing or other
The next thing we knew they had kicked in our door.

And they never did give us a reason.
They never did give us a rhyme.
And they never did give us an answer
When it came to the Killing Time.

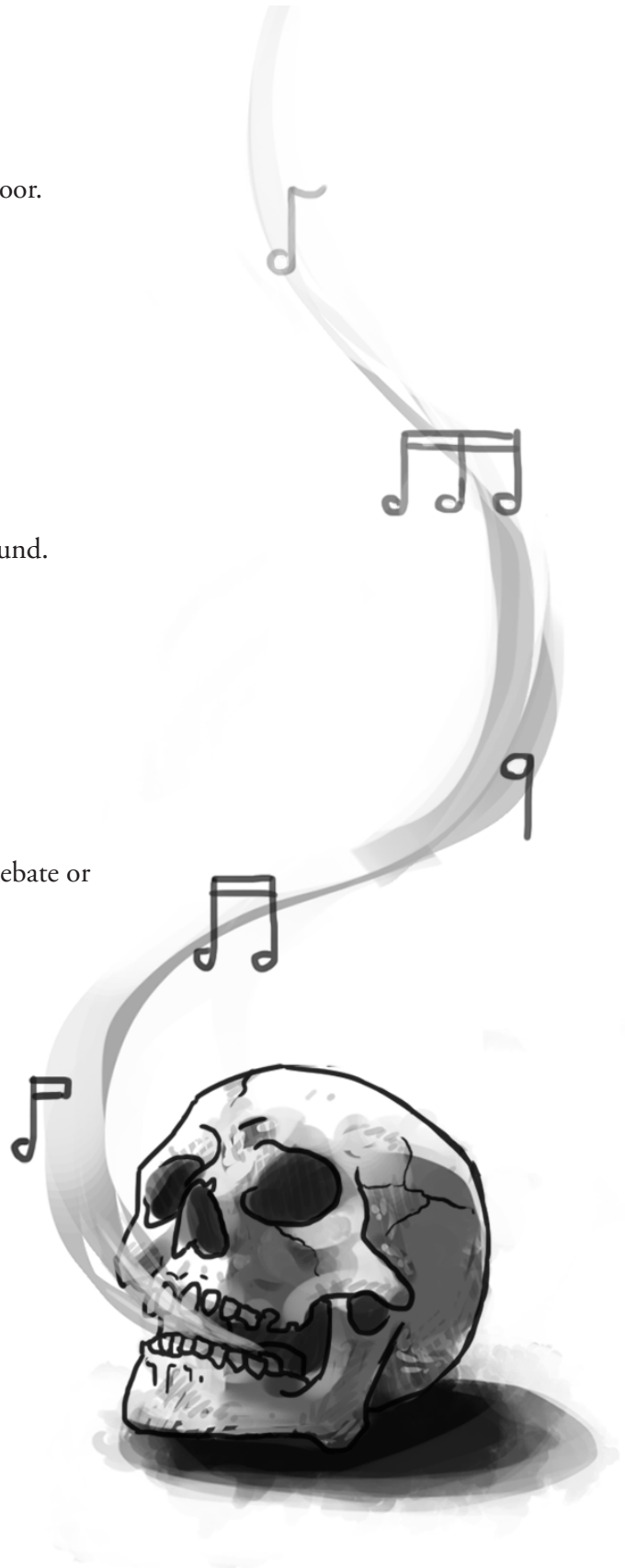
It wasn't enough to submit, now.
No, it wasn't enough to bow down.
They made sure, you see, if you had a degree
Or a brain cell you'd soon be three feet under ground.

So they murdered the merchants of reason.
They slaughtered the spinners of rhyme.
Hot blood irrigated the killing fields
That they sowed in the Killing Time.

It wasn't that tough to see through them.
The tyrants had little disguise
But they would scream "Traitor" at those who'd debate or
Poke holes in the tissue of those little lies.

They accused everybody of treason
Who noticed the scheme of the rhyme
For they no longer needed reason:
In the season of Killing Time.

Time passed and then soon we forgot them.
Time passed and blood was soon dry.
The movies were made. The directors were paid.
And the audience had them a good little cry.



Caillin Jenkinson

Then we gave them awards for their reason.
We sang them their praises in rhyme,
While secretly grateful that we hadn't lived
To witness the Killing Time.

The bullets, they never stopped flyin'
They just flew much lower, my friend.
Far under the radar, but sooner or later
The haters and tyrants would rise once again.

While philosophers mourned for our reason
Musicians sang fancy new rhymes
And the late-night comedians killed it
When they joked of the Killing Time.

So when the next crisis arises
As finance, election, or bombs,
Remember to think, 'cause you know in the blink
Of an Eye for an Eye, you'll be singin' their song.

'Cause they never will give you a reason
They never will give you a rhyme
And they never will answer your questions
When you question the Killing Time

So if this ol' saw has a moral
If moral should matter at all
Don't go back to sleep. Do not be a sheep
Or they'll herd you to join in their murderous call.

So never abandon your reason
And never surrender your rhyme
And never encourage the killing
When they call for the next Killing Time.

DEATH IS NO LONGER AN OPTION

"Do it." My voice trembled with false hope. The man in front of me held a weathered Colt 1911 at my brow. He was young, no older than twenty-two. Slenderly built with a buzzed head, and a tattoo belonging to a local street gang drawn on his neck. It was a cross with a tailless scorpion wrapped tightly around it. I'd heard rumours that with each mugging, a segment would be added to the scorpion's tail, only to add the stinger once he had taken a life.

His inexperience showed. The way he avoided eye contact. How he held the firearm with palms lubricated from sweat, his index finger on the trigger guard instead of the trigger.

"D...don't you test me girl," he said. "I'll fucking kill you, I'll really do it."

"Ha, you can't kill me, even if you tried."

"I'm serious, bitch! I'll splatter your fucking brains all over this alley way."

God, this kid was obnoxious. "Hey, if you're gonna shoot me can you hurry up?" If he wasn't going to follow through, I had other matters to attend to. "I've got a date I need to get to and I really don't want to be late."

"Okay you know what, fuck you, you're dead." With a sloppy pull of a trigger, the hammer struck the firing pin, igniting the round held within. The explosion echoed through the winding alleyway. The bullet spiraled into my head and out the other side. A piercing ring pulsed through my ears. My eyes were blinded momentarily.



"Mary, hey Mary open your eyes," Tom said.

"It's quite bright out, I'd rather not." The warm rays of July's summer sun caressed my

body.

"Quickly now, you'll miss the show," Tom urged.

"All right, fine." I opened my eyes towards the sky. The blue canvas sky was dotted with barrage balloons. Motorized aircraft could be heard flying overhead.

"See those planes? One day I'm going to enroll in the Royal Air Force and fly them myself," Tom said.

"What are they doing?"

"They're heading over the channel, probably searching for Nazis."

"You don't really want to join the military, do you?" I was worried for him. I loved him. I didn't want him dying in the war.

"I have to, Mary," he said. "I'm twenty-four, I'm a man. I have to fight for my country and the King."

"What about us, Thomas? What about the baby?" My hands rested on my ever-growing stomach.

"That's the future I'm fighting for. You and the child." He put his arm around me. "I love you Mary, and we'll always be together."

My vision faded to white, and the warmth around me vanished.



The pain was immense. However, it subsided moments after the bullet paraded its way out of my skull and left my body to heal itself.

"Dude, that really hurt and you got blood all over my dress." I liked this dress too. The once-white sequined fabric clung around my bust and flared into a cold blue just past my hips. I was a few days from twenty-one when I received it as a gift. Seventy-eight years ago.

"What the hell? You're not dead!" The man's face was as pale as the arctic tundra. He still held the gun to my head.

"Nope, I'm not dead. I told you that

shooting me wouldn't work." The wannabe thug's reaction to the situation was nothing out of the ordinary. As far as he knew, he just murdered a young woman, and that was more than most could stomach. Let alone having her speak back to you with a cadence bordering on sadism.

"Wh—what's happening?" he whimpered. "Monster? Monster, you're a MONSTER, A FREAK, INHUMAN." In a panic, his grip on the pistol became loose and slid out of his hands. I reached out and retrieved it from gravity's clutches. The handle was uncomfortably warm from sweat and blood. The gun was now pointed in the opposite direction. I aimed at the mugger's head.

"Please don't shoot, please, I'll do anything."

"You know, I've lived for a long time," I said. "Long enough to know that people like you aren't worth compassion."

"You can't kill me. I have a family. They need me."

"I once had a family too, but they're no longer here."

Tears filled his eyes. His knees hit the ground while he firmly clasped his hands together. I remembered when Tom had knelt in front of me. He held a diamond ring asking me to wed him. His palms were equally as sweaty. He was foolish to believe I'd say no, but then again I was foolish to believe that he'd survive the war. Crawling out of his flaming aircraft. Only to be executed on his knees. It boiled my blood.

"Worthless," I whispered under my breath. "People like you are why good people die unnecessarily." I squeezed the trigger.

POETRY | Isabella Kennedy

A MINUTE OF SILENCE

I wonder what everyone else is thinking, everyone's eyes
are shut. I shut my eyes too. The scratchy fabric of my sweater itches
at my neck but we aren't allowed to move. I stand
as still as I can, like that statue game we play at recess. I always lose. I think my finger
is bleeding. I stuck the poppy pin in too deep. I put it in my mouth. Someone coughs
and the boys who stand in front of me start laughing. I feel like pinching
them. I wonder where my poppy is hanging in the gym. I tried
to draw it exactly like my Nonna said. She was my age during
the war. She said they killed her best friend in the ditch
by her house. Who is "they"?

My mom says that the soldiers are
in heaven now, with the angels. I want to meet an angel. I wonder
if they look like the faeries in our yard. The bagpipes
have started again and I feel the hairs
at the back of neck rise. I feel like crying. Once the images
come they don't stop. The fields were full of blood
they said, or was it poppies? The bodies piled up
as tall as trees, airplanes roaring
in my ears. I can't stop. My tummy hurts.
The minute of silence is over.
I open my eyes.

WHO TIME REALLY IS

Farah Pruett was only fifteen when, on an early Sunday afternoon, a man broke into her family home. It all happened too fast for her to even register what was going on. The man was a known fugitive who had just escaped a maximum-security prison. Farah knew this because he had been all over the news for weeks, and he had a distinctive scar running down the length of his left cheek.

Farah's father, Paul, instantly ushered his wife, son, and daughter into the common room in the basement. "Stay down here, and do not make a sound," her father calmly spoke. "I will be back before you know it."

Those were the last words she would ever hear from her father. Shots rang through the floorboards, echoing into the room Farah, her mother, and her brother Jackson were hiding in. Each of their faces went a ghostly white as a heavy thud reverberated through their ears.

Her mother quickly moved Jackson into the laundry room off to the side and guided Farah inside of the TV cabinet. All the while she herself stood tall, her body quaking at whoever was making their way down the staircase. "Jackson, Farah, please remember your father and I love you with all our hearts, no matter what happens," Farah's mother whispered to the empty room.

The ugly man kicked in the door with an effortless grunt, his one hand grasping the blood-stained revolver. "There you are." His blackened teeth gleamed.

"Where is my husband?" Tears breached her mother's eyes. "Paul, Paul!"

The brute of a man tsked. "Sweetheart, don't make a fuss, you'll see him soon."

Farah could only watch in horror through

the crack of the cabinet doors as the convict sounded another shot. Her mother's body collapsed to the hardwood floor. The only thing she could remember next was her older brother catapulting himself onto the man's back. Within seconds the barbarian tossed Jackson like a ragdoll into their mother's pool of blood.

These memories haunted Farah like a nightmare stuck on replay, as all she did was watch her family's murder unravel before her eyes. The killer stared down at his work through dead eyes before escaping through the basement door to the outside world. The image of the murder played with her mind as she fought to understand why this all happened and wished she could change the past.



After the death of her family, Farah Pruett has been researching any and all ways to turn back time. Each piece has led her further and further, until one day she makes a connection tied to a particular place. The common occurrence is a powerful immortal being with the gift to control time, the very thing she desires.

One legend speaks of a corrupted forest oozing with maleficent demons controlled by the timelord himself. It happens to be located on the outskirts of her town, deep within the once-evergreen foliage. The only catch: the immortal being has been said to loathe any breathing creature, and if displeased, his devoted followers are free to do as they wish with the visitor.

Farah has devised a plan to seek out this creature that may have the power to fulfill her increasing wants. To see her mother's warm smile as the house fills with the scent of freshly-baked cinnamon oatmeal cookies. Or the cluttered mess her father always manages to make when he tries to clean the house. Or even the constant pestering of her brother Jackson.



These simple memories overwhelm Farah as she hauls her bag over her right shoulder and embarks on her chosen path.



Farah has been waiting for this moment for what feels like a lifetime. Once she finds him, he won't be able to refuse. The air sits like an anchor in her lungs as she makes her way through the narrow forest path. Leaves shatter into dust underfoot as she steps forward. The wind's rage howls at her presence.

Her body tenses as she catches sight of a pair of crimson eyes staring at her. The ebony creature screeches at the top of its lungs, summoning its companions. Before she has the chance to even think about running, they surround her.

In an instant, the inky-coloured creatures block out all of the surrounding light, like an eclipse covering the sun. The henchmen close in on Farah with their snarls and jagged teeth, their luminous eyes beaming towards her body. Each creature's mouth salivates as its razor-sharp claws dig into the earth.

Farah's body betrays her, as its sole reaction is to freeze from utter fear. The intensity of these creatures' desire is overpowering as she fights the urge to collapse to the forest floor. Her senses are still in a momentary delay as the ground beneath her starts to rumble. As if parting the red sea, the jet-black creatures make room for what she can only assume is their master, and the whole reason she trekked her way through the dead forest.

The trees rattle against one another with each colossal stride. Her head naturally tilts upwards to see the being she has read so much about. The only thing she can do is wait for it to reach her, as she is not allowed to move an inch with its followers standing guard.

The air grows tight around Farah's chest as the being stands before her. It is like nothing

she could have ever imagined; the illustrations within the many books she read got it all wrong. He stands about three feet tall, and has a long, wiry beard full of twigs tossed over his shoulder.

"And who might you be?" the short man asks Farah in a deafeningly deep voice.

She can't help but wonder how this tiny creature has the power to control a demonic army. Her mind races back to what he said. "Farah Pruett, I have come here—"

"Let me guess, to turn back the continued progress of existence?" He waves his hand lazily towards her, his eyes growing darker with each word. "Trust me, I have heard this before throughout the centuries and I, the Lord of Time, will have no more of it." He begins to turn back into the dark abyss behind him.

"But, what if I...made a deal with you." Her voice comes out shakier than she would like.

Time whips his head back, his eyes narrow. "What would you have to offer me?" He gestures his short arms to his pint-sized body. "I'm the very keeper of all things past, present, and future."

"Anything, anything at all, just bring them back," Farah pleads.

"Darling, don't beg," he commands.

Her body starts to shake uncontrollably as tears stream down her face. She takes a hesitant step towards Time, and just like before, she is encircled by the bloodthirsty creatures. "I can't do this," Farah's voice breaks. "I don't want to be alone anymore." Her legs give way as her body crumples to the dirt floor.

"I am not one to be controlled by the weak-minded," Time finishes. He disappears into the blackened forest he first emerged from.

As if the ebony creatures were commanded to do so, they advance towards Farah's sobbing figure in the centre of their circle. She feels their intent in the air. One of the entities

breathes its cool breath down her neck;
another takes its powerful jaw and clamps it
down on her right arm. Screams of anguish
and terror are ripped out of her, as her mind
is overwhelmed with thoughts of failure to
the family she has lost. A metallic smell fills
the air. The feeding frenzy engulfs the last of
Farah's being.

LITERARY FICTION | Katy Weicker
THIRTY-FIVE

Do not judge my story
by the chapter you walked in on.
—Author unknown

1

“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

I smirked at the stupidity of the question. I knew what they wanted to hear. I’d work my way up the corporate ladder. I wanted to grow with the company. Blah. Blah. Blah.

2.5 kids, white picket fence...maybe a dog? A cat? No, definitely a dog....

2

Kindergarten:

“When I grow up, I want to be a princess. I want to marry a prince and live in a castle. I want a pet unicorn. I’ll name him Fred.”

3

I was eight.

“Your mommy and I love you girls very much. I’m just going to live in another house.”

I stared down at the Cheerios floating like tiny life rafts in my bowl and vomited. That was the last time I ever ate breakfast cereal.

4

Someday my prince will come...

It was December 13th. Winter Formal. I was fifteen. My blue taffeta dress crinkled against his stiff black dress pants. A disco ball spun a kaleidoscope of light fractals and starry-eyed dreams across the gymnasium floor and my young mind. I had skinned knees and stains on my dress and my reputation.

The next day, I learned my prince would leave just as easily as he came.

5

Fourteen years of heartbreak and the occasional orgasm:

Boys are stupid.

I was (allegedly) in love.

Guys are assholes.

I was infatuated.

Men are scum.

I was—this close—to becoming a lesbian.

6

Dick pics.

7

“I’m pregnant,” my younger sister announced. Tears brimmed in her eyes.

I couldn’t tell if they were happy tears or sad tears. Judging from my parents’ reaction, this was good news. But when did that change? When did a positive pregnancy test become a joyful sight? I had a scare a few months ago and almost shit myself until a single line on a tube of plastic in a drug store bathroom assured me I had dodged a bullet. My sister was twenty-six. I was twenty-nine.

8

“Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you. Happy birthday, dear Jenny. Happy birthday to you....”

Thirty candles. A fucking edible forest fire.

9

“How desperate do you think I am?” I asked.

Becky opened her mouth.

“It was rhetorical!” I cried.

“Blake’s really sweet,” she assured me.

“Cute?”

My little sister shrugged and twirled her wedding ring absentmindedly around her finger.

10

Blake was not cute. He wasn’t a troll either. A solid six in the looks department. Put him on a treadmill, get him to an orthodontist, a barber, maybe a seven.... He had a pension. I didn’t. He took me to a nice enough restaurant. The waiters wore crisp white shirts and black

dress pants. The food had ingredients I couldn't pronounce and prices I couldn't afford. He ordered for me. I let him. I judged myself for it.

11

Swordfish. *I hate swordfish.*

I said I had a headache, I said I'd call him.... I lied.

12

"I'm pregnant," Becky exclaimed.

Jesus, not another one.

13

"Hey Blake. It's Jenny...."

14

He grunted. Like a dog chowing down on a bowl of kibble. I faked it.

15

"Don't judge me," I begged.

Becky stared at me. Blinkered. She was judging.

"Please, Beck, come on...."

She sighed. Shook her head. "Blake's so great...."

The sound of his grunts rang in my ears like gunfire to a soldier with PTSD. My stomach gurgled. My skin crawled. "I'm not attracted to him!"

"Come on, Jen. You aren't a kid anymore. There are more important things than looks!"

I felt like an asshole. A shallow, thirty-one-year-old asshole.

"Give it time," she assured me. "He's perfect for you."

(On paper.)

16

"Happy birthday, Jen," Blake whispered. His morning breath smelled like garlic. His morning wood poked into my thigh.

I squirmed.

Thirty-two.

17

Dear Diary,

I broke up with Blake today. He cried.

Sincerely,

Forever Alone.

18

Thirty-three... The tequila flowed in a steady stream of self-deprivation.

"Hey, it's Blake. Leave a message and I'll call you back...."

19

"I'm glad you called," Blake said.

I nodded and took a bite of my swordfish.

A gaggle of waiters were gathered around the booth next to us, singing "Happy Birthday" to a pair of giant breasts shoved into a tiny black dress. She buried her blonde head into her boyfriend's leather jacket. I would have bet he smelled amazing.

Blake always smelled a little like mothballs.

"I missed you, Jen," he said.

I nodded and took another bite. I glanced over at the booth beside us.

"Happy twenty-fifth, Baby!" Leather Jacket exclaimed to Giant Breasts.

Blake placed his moist palm on top of my hand. "Are you ok? You seem a little quiet...."

I nodded and put down my fork. "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

"I'd like to be married. Have a kid, maybe two. A cat...no, a dog...definitely a cat...."

20

An uncomfortable breeze sprouted goose pimples across my bare knees.

"Thirty-four. If you want to have kids, you should think about sooner rather than later...."

You know when you don't need your life choices questioned? When you're spread-eagle on an exam table....

21

Tick...

A cute guy started working in the cubicle across the hall. He asked me for my number. I ended up on antibiotics. I told Blake I had a bladder infection.

22

Tock...

Becky was right, there were more important things than looks. These were the things I reminded myself of as Blake's hairy belly slapped against mine in the dark.

23

"I love you, too."

It wasn't that Disney-happily-ever-after love I dreamed of when I was little. Nor was it that passionate pleasure-you-to-the-point-you-think-you're-going-to-pass-out love, but it was enough. Blake was comfortable. Easy. He was so good on paper. He'd make a good dad.

24

For better or for worse.... How did I let things get this far?

Blake kissed me. *Fuck my life.*

25

"Do you need a refill on your birth control?" Dr. Warner asked.

I stared at the poster of a fetus hanging suspended in a sea of dissected reproductive organs. I tried to imagine a tiny human that looked like Blake ballooning my stomach out like a beach ball before exploding out of me. A solid six. Like its father.

I shook my head and said a prayer my genetics were stronger than my husband's.

26

Tears filled my eyes as Blake hugged me.

"It's only been a few months," he assured me.

27

Blood. Again.

28

"I'm pregnant," Becky announced.

Seriously?

29

An inconspicuous trip to the ladies' room. My favorite underwear stained with failure.

I had tears in my eyes and tumbleweeds in my womb.

And a plate of cold swordfish waiting for me.

Poetic irony, folks.

30

Dr. Warner suggested Blake go for testing. It was less invasive for him to get checked first. The idea of him jerking off into a plastic cup made my skin crawl. He asked me to go with him. To give him a hand.

The room was sterile. There was paper on the exam table. It crinkled under his bare ass.

I pretended I was milking a cow.

31

"I'm sorry." Blake was crying. Like a fucking infant.

An actual snot bubble formed in his nostril as he sobbed. His arms reached for me. To comfort him.

...in sickness, and in infertility...

32

"Make a wish, Auntie Jenny," my nephew instructed.

I closed my eyes and blew. Thirty-five years snuffed out in a single breath.

Happy birthday to me.

33

"I'm sorry, Jen." My sister's eyes welled with tears.

I wanted to assure her I was relieved. That

this was for the best. That we had been fighting for months. But I couldn't. Because *he* left *me*. I was distant. I blamed him. He couldn't take the disappointed looks anymore. I made him feel like shit.

My infertile, settled-for-Six thought he could do better.

He wasn't wrong.

34

The leaves were crisp under my feet. Not that freshly-fallen September crunchiness, but that late-November crystallized-with-frost texture. Like freezer-burned chicken. They were past their prime. And I was single. Again.

35

"Where do you see yourself in five years?"

I have no fucking clue.

FANTASY | Benjamin Weick
STONE WISHES

For twenty hours of the voyage, Suma had draped herself over the gunnel of the Aethership like wet paper. It would be worth it, she told herself, while ignoring the boatman's long stories about the others who came previously, and how they left shaken and thoughtful. She didn't even know the boatman's name, but he knew the Aetheric currents and the destination, and thus she paid him the last of her money for the trip there and back.

When she finally saw the island in the clouds, she wept, not for the end of nauseous suffering, but for the promise of her family's future. As soon as they landed, she hopped onto the shining obsidian shore and started walking. On her trek to the peak she repeated prayers that she would learn to save her family in time. She ignored the colourful flowers and plentiful greenery.

The door to the hermit's tower was a masterpiece of carved wood dragons and seraphim, but the ornate knocker was barely glanced over before its sombre tone echoed through the halls.

She would learn the secrets of the Weave. She would save her family name.

She waited for someone to answer the door. No one came. Suma knocked again and, after a minute, pushed the door open. The room looked old and unkempt. Rotting, intricate furniture was scattered throughout the room.

"Hello?"

The room was silent. Was the Hermit still alive? Were the rumours of his existence false?

She stepped forward slowly and cautiously. Three steps... Four... Five...

The door swung shut without a sound, except for that of a latch clicking into place. Suma turned around, expecting the light to

dim, but it didn't. It was brighter, a glow that emanated from the spiralling stonework of the tower.

A low hum vibrated through her feet, and she got the distinct impression of someone stretching their arms and yawning.

"Hello?" she said.

"Welcome, Suma." The Voice was warm but tired. "Why have you come?"

"I want to learn of the Weave to save my family from the Traitor's noose," she said, certain that the reason would be worthy.

"To save a family? A single family? How short-sighted. It isn't even out of charity, but out of blood obligation."

"They gave me life and my name. They are innocent of the crimes they are accused of." Her fury rose.

"Would you give them up to learn the secrets of the Weave?"

What? What sort of question was that? They were the reason that she wanted to learn of the Weave. She needed to save them, but if she learned, she couldn't save them.

"Yes," she lied.

"Do you, Suma, wish to learn from me, to forgo all previous ties and bonds of this world, and become my apprentice?"

"I do," she said.

"Good." The Voice sounded slick and sly now, like a dog found in the corner with the dinner steaks.

Nothing happened for a long moment. Then as Suma tried to take a step forward, she found she was not able to. Her feet were turned to stone. As she looked on in panic, the rest of her flesh started to turn light grey too. A single word was uttered from her lips before they too hardened: "Bastard."



She didn't know how long it had been, yet it felt like three hundred eternities had shaken

her hand and left. She didn't even realize that she was no longer a statue until a spark landed on her nose, startling her upright. A fire was crackling in the centre of the room, made from the broken and tattered furniture. Intricate and rotting designs of birds burned into an oily black smoke that drifted upwards and disappeared in the darkness. A rough woolen blanket was draped upon her shoulders.

"I am sorry for that spell, but it is a tradition to enforce the cutting of ties," the Voice said. "It has been twenty-one years, to the minute, since you first entered and demanded my tutelage. So let this be the first lesson: Do not do anything without being willing to follow through."

Suma couldn't believe it at first: twenty-one years? Her family would be dead and long rotted on the Traitor's Gallows. Her face felt wet. That couldn't be right; she must have been stone for only an hour at most, albeit one that dragged on.

That zarking bastard! He ruined every opportunity for her rescue attempt. Now her brother Jahn was dead. She would never smell her father's baked trout. She would never carve wood with her mother again.

Sobs turned into a torpor, the torpor turned into a thoughtful silence, and the silence turned into a deep and quiet rage. Her blood froze with anger at Lord Karkas for imprisoning her family, at the Voice for taking any chance for rescue away, and at herself for putting all hope in a legend that prevented the very thing she was seeking.

Calm down, she heard her mother's voice say, *if there is a knot in the wood, work with it, not against it*. The iron resolve she used to bring herself here melted, ready to take another form. She was uncertain, but she had to move forward. She might learn things that could bring her family back, or she might not. She felt a fiery numbness.

"What must I do to learn how to manipulate the Weave?" Suma asked the silence.

"Ready for the first lesson already? Impressive."

The floor shifted, and a table rose up, made from the same cobblestone that lay beneath her feet. On top was a table of closely-packed vertical dominoes. All but three were black. "The lesson is simple. Grab the three white dominoes without disturbing the black ones."

"How does—"

"I will explain after."

Suma sighed but walked up to the table. She looked closer at the dominoes, expecting a trick. Nothing out of the ordinary appeared.

Carefully she wormed her fingers in so that they would not knock over the black ones and grasped the first domino. Nothing happened. She picked it up and placed it to the side.

She looked closely at the second one. It looked shinier, possibly slippery. She grasped it on the numerical pips, so it wouldn't slip out of her fingers, and placed it near the side.

She moved to the third one. It looked much as the first, if a bit bluer and fuzzier? Probably made from a different material. She touched it—and immediately doubled over as a hurricane of dizziness hit her. She heard a clatter as the dominoes were knocked down by her arm. A couple even fell between her and the floor as it rushed to meet her, only to stick like marbles in her side when she landed.

The Voice seemed to echo all around as she tried to stop the tilting of the room. "You cannot just alter the Weave without consequences. Every action has a ripple effect. When not careful, and I do mean *when* and not *if*, any change to it will spiral out of control. That domino was enchanted, but you didn't and couldn't notice that. You did, however, notice the second one was oiled. Only three of my applicants have ever noticed that."

“Zark you!”

“I know this lesson seems like one in futility, but it is necessary. Alter the Weave wrongly, and it will spiral out of control. One Weaver caused everyone in a city of millions to freeze in time when they tried to make their people never go hungry. Another made himself unable to leave his house when he tried to make it see to his every need. Some effects are worse than others.”

“Are you saying I’m zarked if I do anything?”

“Not quite, I am saying that you must consider whether you need to alter the Weave at all. The temptation can lead to people’s downfalls when they alter the Weave on a whim. The most effective Weavers I have met are the ones who play the long game. Trimming here and adding there, but never making broad strokes. It is about striking a balance. Breaking that balance invites the temptation.”

Suma thought, and a silence crept into the room.

Minutes passed and finally the Voice broke the silence. “You can still live as you are, without the Weave. You can help the poor, overthrow the Lord you loathe, or travel the world. This will be your last chance to say no. Many applicants have said it, knowing they couldn’t safely deal with the temptation.”

Suma thought some more, then answered, “Lord Karkas took everything away from me. I don’t know if he is dead by now, but others like him would still be out there. Power-hungry tyrants who care more for appearances than for the people who live under them. I have no family, no past, and now only one future. I say yes. Allow me to Weave.”

“Very well.” The table and dominoes melted into the floor, and the fire disappeared. Suma felt trapped in the darkness, unable to move, suffocating.

The door suddenly opened, releasing her

from the blackness. The light on the floor and walls looked different now. She examined a cobblestone at her feet and saw the very threads that made it into what it was: ten of them, she knew, determined its hardness; five determined its colour; and twenty would create different reactions with others, depending on the weft. There were an infinite number of threads that she could examine. She tried tugging on one. Immediately the room filled with dust as the stone pulverized. She giggled with her newfound power and immediately regretted it, choking on the grit in the air. The Voice was right. If she rushed without thinking, it would be her downfall, and her actions would only result in dust.

A breeze came through the door, clearing the dust and drawing her attention outside. It was just about evening.

“I will be here if you need me.” The Voice seemed faded and sleepy. “But your family needs you now. It was only a few minutes that you were petrified, not years. I needed to make sure that you were distanced from the need and your intent was pure.”

Suma simply smiled as she started towards the moored Aethership. “See you in twenty-one years.”

POETRY | Rachelle Elisabeth Bramly
WILDFIRE

it was the week we did not see the sky
asphyxiation arrived in odes of ash
obstinate odour enshrouded in clouds
an apocalyptic sun beat red
by a miasma of burning trees

it felt
like the end.

it was the week we did not see the sky
encompassing clouds carved cinders of grey
stagnated silence stood stilted in smog
a leftover fire-blaze bled red
on an up-swelter of sweating skin

the end
would not end.

it was the week we finally saw the sky
red heavens parted a pathway to our chests
unconcealed sun revealed sunbeam breath
a clearing balsam formed from blue skies
they excavated embers out of our eyes

but then
the end
came again.

THE FINAL FLIGHT OF THE C.S.S. STARLIGHT

The final twenty-four hours of the *C.S.S. Starlight* is not the sort of day—if we can even call twenty-four hours in interplanetary space a “day”—that heralds disaster. True that this is war, and disasters are commonplace, be they heralded or not¹, yet this day begins rather uneventfully. The most notable thing that has happened all morning is that Captain James McAllister has publicly reprimanded two officers for gossiping on the bridge.

The two have not, as McAllister has assumed, been gossiping; however, hearing Lieutenant Shelley Romano say, “I didn’t hear everything he was saying, but it sounded like...” has certainly made McAllister think the worst. He gives Romano the job of replacing corroded panels on the outside of the ship—the “Space Walk from Hell,” as the squaddies call it. It is an assignment that no one ever wants—more than fitting for a busybody.

Other than this public reprimand, the day has been notably calm. Romano licks her wounds somewhere in the mess before suiting up.

Romano does not know this yet, but her Captain’s mood is not the thing she should be afraid of.

In truth, McAllister is not angry, but tired and feeling on edge. He would sleep, but he can’t; even for a veteran, sleep is hard to come by in zero gravity under the best of conditions.

The *C.S.S. Starlight*, however, is not the best of conditions.

The *Starlight* is a newer warship, in the family of vessels known as “sub-visible” or S-Class. Colloquially, they are known as “subs,” or the even more common “S-Boat.” The call-back to old German submarines from the First and Second World Wars is not an unfair comparison.

As with U-boats, S-boats are incredibly cramped, though not as cramped as they were back when they were first employed by the Martian Space Service². An S-boat used during the First War of Mars would have had enough space to fit a maximum of nine sailors³.

Since those days, technology has vastly improved, and skins can be manufactured for a much higher energy efficiency.

The *C.S.S. Starlight*, therefore, is nowhere near as cramped as an MWI S-boat, with thirty souls on board instead of nine, but she is still a sardine-can. The divisions between the bridge, mess hall, engine room and crew quarters are marked more by colour than by outright

¹ Especially during this time, which is over two years into the Second War of Mars—the bloodiest period of the war, according to many scholars. There is disagreement as to which theatre saw the highest casualty rate (the current candidates are the Jovan Asteroid Battles, or the siege of Acidalia City on Mars) but the general time-frame is largely agreed upon. For more on this see: Jennifer Brickstone, *Systemic Chaos: How the Second War of Mars Set the Solar System on Fire*, (Aldrin City: Aldrin University Press, 2311), 134-168. Another perspective can be found in: Arlan Jeffries, *Mending the Past: Common Misconceptions About the Second War of Mars*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2310), 25-42.

² Back in those days, their sub-visibility skins were made from pure Saganite, which was not only hard to come by but also extremely energy-inefficient. Remember, this was prior to the discovery of massive Saganite deposits on Calisto, and at least a decade prior to Winifred Maltese’s Nobel-Prize-winning process of combining Saganite with Silicon to make for a much more eco-friendly material. For more on this see: James Dore III, *Forgotten Martyrs: S-Boat Operations in the Second War of Mars* (Marilyn City: Mount Marilyn University Press, 2304) 133-137.

³ Those nine would be fairly uncomfortable by the end of their three-week tour of duty since they would not be able to stand up straight. Veterans of MWI S-class attack ships would often joke that the “S” actually stood for “sardine.” Testimony of MWI S-boat sailors can be found in Dore, *Forgotten Martyrs*, 140-143. See also: Dianne Collingwood, “Sailors Speak: What Eyewitness Accounts of the First War of Mars Tell Us Today,” *Journal of Military History*, vol.380 no.3 (Summer: 2300), 643-690.

division. There are few hatches to speak of, except leading to the engine room.

In effect, the ship's dimensions make service aboard the *Starlight* incredibly uncomfortable, and stressful, even in times of inaction.

The similarities don't end with dimension. There is a price to be paid for sub-visibility, just as there once was with being submerged. Whenever the skin is engaged, an S-boat crew must power down as much electrical equipment as they can, to retain battery power for life-support. Furthermore, steering the ship emits a burst of gas, which *can* be seen, even when the ship is cloaked. To move when hidden, is to open the ship up for attack.

Because of this, accurate mapping of space debris has become a matter of life and death to S-boat sailors. This is keenly on McAllister's mind.

The *C.S.S. Starlight* has been cloaked for going on seventeen hours now. For the better part of the last twenty-four, the *Starlight* has been evading a Martian Space Force Destroyer. The captain must have seen the *Starlight* engage the sub-visible skin shortly after McAllister ordered his ship to fire on a Martian freighter.

The new gunner, Petty Officer First Class Ryan Seaworth, had carried out his duties expertly. He'd loosed an evenly-spread barrage of HIFITs torpedoes⁴ at the freighter, activated the skin, and powered down. Then, the young recruit, showing instincts that could simply not be taught, had waited until the HIFITs torpedoes fragmented into their smaller, more lethal clusters, before altering the course of the *C.S.S. Starlight*. The captain of the destroyer that would surely be accompanying the

freighter may have seen them cloak, but as long as the *Starlight* kept silent for long enough, the enemy would be looking in the wrong place.

It was a brilliant tactic, and McAllister remembers thinking he would recommend the Petty Officer for promotion. The kid hadn't been told to do any of this; he had just known. Of course, McAllister had given the young sailor a tongue-lashing about waiting for orders, and officially reprimanded him. The young man had been out of line, but he'd had good instincts.⁵ Seaworth had likely saved the ship, and if his timing was right, the *Starlight* would be far out of harm's way by morning.

By now.

McAllister has just finished this thought when he hears the Petty Officer in question mention his name, though not to him. About him.

"You scoff, but McAllister's no joke," he says to two of his friends. "Man knows how to do more damage with space than any torpedo, y'know. Battle Between Worlds. The Cap is in one of three ships and they don't have hardly any HIFITs left. Then the Cap sees how the enemy convoy is lined up in space and he thinks, 'Hey! If I take out that centre one, then I don't need no more HIFITs 'cause the debris will do the rest.' It was like knocking down fuckin' dominoes!"

McAllister realizes it is time to stop the fun.

"I just sent an officer out to do muckwork for gossiping, Petty Officer First Class Seaworth. You really think I won't do it to an N.C.O. just because you're telling that absolutely flattering story about me? Think again. You're with Romano on the space-walk.

⁴ HIFITs is military shorthand for "High-Intensity Fragmenting Incendiary Torpedoes." These are torpedoes that explode, at a preset distance, into smaller fragments, that ignite upon contact with oxygen. The idea is that even if the crew aren't killed by decompression, they will still burn to death.

⁵ We know what McAllister's thoughts were on that day because he wrote them down years later, in the form of a suicide note. This note was hidden from the public by his wife, who eventually published it after his death from esophageal cancer, nearly a decade later.

And I'm gonna be there too to make sure you two do a thorough job.”⁶

The Petty Officer protests that he is just trying to raise morale. McAllister snaps that he doesn't want to hear it, though he actually does. His job is to be the hard-ass of the team. He does not tell anyone how many times he catches them breaking the rules and says nothing. It is a great many times. Every once in a while, though, discipline must be maintained.

McAllister and Romano suit up for their space-walk. Petty Officer Seaworth is having difficulty with his helmet, but there is time for the kid to catch up.

McAllister gives the order to raise the blast shields over the port-holes and performs a lookout for any enemy activity. He is vaguely aware that they are, by now, entering the orbit of Ganymede. He knows that this is an enemy moon, but also knows that the majority of the Ganymede space force is fighting the rest of his companions from the Calisto Space Service in the Asteroid Belt. Any reinforcements are weeks, if not months, away.

The blast shields come up, and after a brief sweep, a crew member reports no enemies visible. McAllister, however, does not hear this, since Seaworth chooses that moment to swear at his helmet.

McAllister calls for the report to be repeated, when a distinct metallic

plink

stops him dead in his tracks.

McAllister knows that sound.

He has heard it before at the Battle Between Worlds. It is the sound he heard over the intercom when communicating with the rest of

his S-boat pack right before two of them burst open from explosive decompression.

The hull has been punctured.

A tiny opening about the size of an Earth quarter has appeared in the hull beside Petty Officer Seaworth, who is still fumbling with his helmet. McAllister tries to yank the young sailor away from the wall, but the escaping air is too fast for him, and Seaworth is pulled tightly against the opening. Seaworth's eyes go wide. He thrashes about in abject panic as he feels the skin on his back rip through his suit and out into the vacuum of space. He feels his kidneys force through his space-suit and out the hole into space. He stomach is next to go, followed by his small intestines, and the regulator on his space suit. As his large intestine blasts through the tiny opening, a sound escapes the young sailor that barely resembles anything human.

McAllister, knowing it is too late to save the boy, orders an emergency suit-up that also proves to be too late. The quarter-sized hole in the vessel becomes the size of a soccer-ball, and then finally, the *C.S.S. Starlight* tears herself in two, flinging her contents and her crew into the star-speckled void.

Only McAllister, Romano, and the engineering team of six crew members, sealed in the engine room, will survive this day.



An orbital mine is a lump of metal approximately the size of a mothball. The term “mine” is misleading because a person hearing it would presuppose an explosive device of some sort⁷. The operative word is not so much “mine” as it is “orbit”. An object, in orbit

⁶ This exchange was captured by the *Starlight*'s black box recorder, which was recovered several months after the incident described in this writing.

⁷ In truth, the orbital mine amounts to simply metal—iron and lead, specifically. Any explosive involved with these mines concerns only their placement within the orbit of a major celestial body. See: Maximillian Rockatansky, *Innovations of the Second War of Mars* (New York: Hyperion, 2301), 42-43.

around Earth, travels at an estimated velocity of 28,000 km/h. Anything that crosses its trajectory risks collision with what amounts to a supercharged iron bullet. The mines are painted black, preventing visual detection. The cold iron makes them virtually invisible to infra-red scanners. Their exclusion from maps of charted space debris makes them an unmitigated war-hazard⁸.

Until now, though, no one had thought to weaponize this.

A final irony, which James McAllister will later learn, long after the incident, is that this thought would likely not have occurred to anyone at mission control—on either side of the war—had it not been for McAllister's own crowning strategic achievement three years earlier at the Battle Between Worlds—the achievement for which Petty Officer First Class Ryan Seaworth held him in such esteem. The same achievement that had earned him the command of the *Starlight*. What's more, he likely *would* have heard rumblings about how the orbital mine was being put into use by the enemy, had he turned more of a blind eye to officers gossiping on the ship, since this very concern was the subject of the discussion he had ended between the two Lieutenants earlier that day.

He will, however, learn this later.

Now, in this sickening spin through space, clinging to the wreck of what remains of the *C.S.S. Starlight*, a stray thought leaps into McAllister's mind. Petty Officer Seaworth had said the Battle Between Worlds was “like knockin' down fuckin' dominoes.” McAllister had liked the simile when he'd first heard it, but now, in this endless, nauseating whirl, he realizes that it is less like dominoes and more

like pool. He is an eight-ball hurtling across a table that never ends. He wants to shout this at Seaworth, but then remembers that Seaworth is likely—

hopefully

—dead by now.

McAllister does not know that Seaworth, despite having been pulled through a hole the diameter of a mothball, has not yet died. He, like McAllister, also spins through space, but Seaworth spins in halves, connected only by the soft tissue that didn't get blown into space during the initial decompression. McAllister cannot see Seaworth try to shriek and manage only a soundless, guttural vibration in the airless void. He cannot see the tears boil on Seaworth's cheeks.

The one who *does* see this is Lieutenant Shelley Romano—the same Lieutenant Romano whom McAllister had scolded for gossiping on the bridge earlier that day. The Shelley Romano, who, prior to being scolded for a gossip, was asking advice of her colleague about whether or not it was appropriate to tell the Captain that she'd overheard some Admirals discussing new enemy ordinance. She was going to say that she hadn't heard everything they were saying, but part of it involved new, hard-to-detect enemy mines. She would have said something, but was cut off by her captain, who then made a public example of her in front of the crew.

Lieutenant Romano remembers this just shortly after she sees Petty Officer First Class Seaworth die. For the next ten years, it is both of those moments that she will see each night in her nightmares. In one of those dreams, Seaworth doesn't die, and chokes silently for eternity, trying to scream her name. In another,

⁸ Furthermore, the shrapnel caused by a destroyed vessel may itself become deadly projectiles. The rapid accumulation of space-debris was known to humankind before the War—as early as the late twentieth century, in fact. It even had a name: the Kessler Effect. This remains a hazard to this day and has caused untold amounts of damage to Ganymede's tourism industry since the war ended.

she defies her Captain, then spits out the crucial information in front of everyone, and the ship is saved.

In the ten years that follow the war, both Retired Captain James McAllister, and Lieutenant Shelley Romano will both find themselves alone in a hotel room, each with a loaded gun on their lap.

McAllister will put the gun into his mouth, squeeze his eyes shut, and tense his finger around the trigger...before slowly placing the weapon on the nightstand beside him. He will pour himself another whisky and sob quietly in the Martian twilight.

Romano will stare ahead at the wall. She will not hesitate. She will not flinch. She will place the pistol under her chin, facing the back of her skull.

She will whisper, "I'm sorry," to the dying Seaworth she still sees in front of her after all these years.

Blackness will follow.

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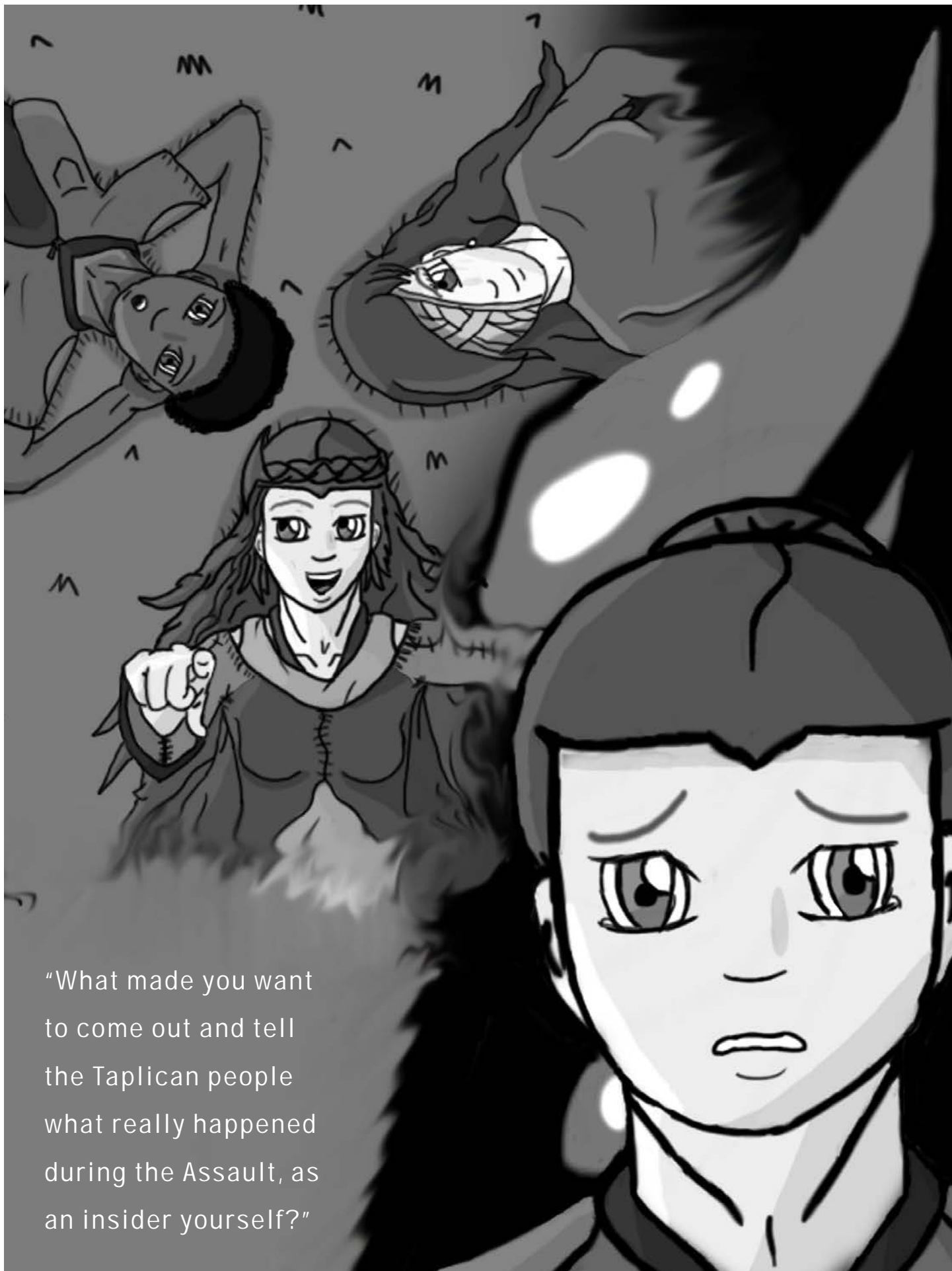
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"What made you want to come out and tell the Taplican people what really happened during the Assault, as an insider yourself?"

LITERARY FICTION | Cameron Simo
HEALING

From inside the elevator, Nova stared at the doors up to the top floor of the apartment building. In her arms was a box of stuff belonging to her best friend Carthy, from the Super Movers truck outside. Once the elevator opened, she made her way silently to the correct apartment, with Carthy following close behind. The ex-Mercenary fished the keys out from her jacket pocket and unlocked the door. Upon entering, she held the door open wide, so Carthy could roll inside easily.

The large suite was practically barren. The curtains in the living room were shut, allowing only a sliver of light to enter. A twin-sized mattress lay near the middle of the room, a plain blanket draped over it. Scattered around the lone mattress were empty containers of cup noodle. Some were stacked several high, one collection even reaching twenty-four cups. Despite the number of containers, only one fork was seen amongst the garbage. The corner of a framed photo peeked out from under the stained pillow. Carthy wheeled further into the stuffy apartment, rolling over the calendar that hadn't been updated for almost a year, not since Gausut of Cycle 2017.

The place, void of colour, was a far cry from what Carthy considered cozy. As the woman explored, she found three spacious bedrooms, two large bathrooms, and a full kitchen. She could've sworn she heard her own heartbeat in the nagging silence of the empty bedrooms. Only one of the bathrooms had toiletries. The kitchen cupboards that Carthy could reach were full of untouched cookware, except for the one that was filled exclusively with cup noodle. The fridge would've been empty had it not been for the bag of mouldy green apples at the back. Dirty glasses filled the sink, and the

reeking garbage can underneath it overflowed with more empty containers of noodles. A rotten apple core sat inside one of the cups.

"You seriously need to lay off the cup noodle, sunshine. That stuff's not good for you," Carthy said as she entered the living room. The disgust on her face faded as she moved further away from the garbage bin.

"Why? It's so good," Nova replied. She looked for a place to put the box she held, settling on a spot next to the doorframe of one of the empty bedrooms. "My manager said I should stop eating out all the time to save money, so I got a lot of cup noodle because it's cheap."

"What about the apples? You barely touched those before they went bad."

"It didn't feel right eating them." Nova frowned. "They were his favourite."

Nova flopped onto the foot of the mattress and sent a few plastic noodle cups into the air before they landed and rolled across the floor. She unsheathed the cracked dagger on her thigh delicately and stared blankly at the light display created by the limited sunlight reflecting off the blade. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Carthy open a window, letting fresh air and the noise of the bustling streets below enter the apartment. She kept her friend in her peripheral while watching the light display change whenever she moved the dagger.

"I guess it's been...has it been hard living on your own? I thought you'd be having all the after parties here. Maybe invite some people over after an interview?" Carthy's voice was quiet, on the verge of a whisper. She moved closer to her distracted friend.

"No one else has been in here," Nova replied. "It's the one place I can be alone."

"What do you do?"

"Stuff. Sleep, eat, practice the smile my manager wants me to have. Got to look happy for the cameras, she says. And my smile isn't

wide enough, or warm enough, whatever that means. I'm trying my hardest! I'm sorry I can't do anything right!"

Nova tightened her grip on the dagger. She shook her head, stood up, and walked towards the electric fireplace. She heard Carthy sigh and adjust herself in her wheelchair. A car horn from the streets below made the ex-Mercenary jump and cover her ears. She didn't let go until the noises stopped. She opened her eyes to see Carthy next to the now-closed window, a troubled expression lining her disfigured face.

"Nova, are you...?"

"Am I okay? Yeah, I'm fine. Really, it's nothing...don't worry about it." She nearly choked on her own words. She gently placed the dagger on the mantelpiece.

"Are you sure? We can talk about it. If you want to, that is."

"I don't want to bore you with my work life." Nova forced some giggling. "You can probably just read about all that in a magazine or something."

"It's not about that. Nova, I think it's about time we talk about...him again. About David."

Nova visibly tensed. She bit the inside of her cheek and leaned against the wall. Shuddering breaths were the only sounds she could make.

David Clarx. He was Nova's Mercenary partner, the person she swore to protect and raise, the person she could lean on. It had been just over a year since his death during the Taplican Assault, the final battle fought that fateful summer's day between the Resistance that he, Nova, and Carthy were recruited into, and the ruler of Magraan, Lord Dyterag. Despite much time passing since the aftermath, the events that took place seemed to have, at least for Nova, ended only moments ago.

"I know you miss him. We all do, but...I can't imagine how it must be for you," Carthy said.

"I'm...I-I'm okay," Nova said after a few tries.

"Nova...."

Nova shook her head. She turned to Carthy, who smiled compassionately from her wheelchair. She looked at where her friend's legs used to be, now stumps at her knees, and her bottom lip quivered.

"All of it...it's all my fault," Nova said, her body shaking as she held back her sorrow. "David would've been...you would...."

The young woman slid down the wall until she sat on the floor. She sobbed, burying her face in her hands. She felt a metallic hand stroke her head tenderly.

"It's okay...it's okay," Carthy whispered repeatedly.

"I could've said 'no' to the mission. He would still be here if I wasn't so stupid!"

Nova struck her head with her hand repeatedly in frustration. Carthy grabbed her wrist to make her stop and placed it in her lap.

"None of this is your fault," Carthy said clearly, taking a deep breath. Her fingers interlocked with Nova's. "You couldn't have known that any of this was going to happen."

"But...how can you be so nice when I... your legs...."

"You had nothing to do with that. The debris happened to find me before you did." She leaned back in her seat, letting go of her friend's hand. "I could've gotten prosthetics, you know. I'd be able to walk around, take the stairs, reach the top shelf."

Nova did her best to hold back her crying. She wiped her face clean of tears and gazed up at Carthy.

"Why didn't you...?"

Carthy pointed to her right eye, directing attention to the cybernetic stand-in that stared back at Nova amidst the burned tissue. She did this using her right arm, long since replaced with a robotic substitute. "Ever since I got these, I thought of them as a curse. I've spent years hating them, trying to find the courage to

get rid of them for good. But, somehow, they were always the reason I stayed alive. I was sick of having to rely on them so, after the Assault, I decided against getting my legs replaced. I guess I just wanted to say 'no' to something, to the first situation in a while that I had real control over. It's not really like I need them anymore, anyways."

Nova nodded, sniffing. Tears still rolled down her cheeks as she listened to the story.

"Life isn't fair, sunshine. It's an unwinnable game that stacks all sorts of odds against you. But, even if you know you're gonna lose, you've got the choice to fight back," Carthy continued. "Sometimes, it helps to look at the bad things in life differently. If it weren't for you accepting that mission, we never would've met. Think of all the places we've been, the things we've done, and the people we've met. None of that would've happened if you two stayed in the Outer Brim."

The woman looked behind her and picked up the photo hidden under the lone pillow on the mattress. She chuckled through tears when she saw the photo of her, Nova, and David that had been taken for them when they visited Arriott Park during Taplica's Harvest Festival.

"Look how long your hair used to be," Carthy said, showing Nova. "I mean, it looked great, but I think shorter hair suits you. Thankfully, that moustache was only face paint."

Nova took the photo from Carthy and looked at it closely. A small smile stretched across her face.

"I like David's silly hat," she said. "It was so big on him, and he had to hold it so it didn't cover his whole head."

"Yeah. And then there's the whiskers he's got there. So fierce." Carthy hissed slightly and pawed her hand forward.

"Remember that girl's face when you asked for the face paint on your bandages?" Nova

pointed towards the painted eye on the gauze that once covered the woman's robotic one.

"She was so confused. And then, David told her to paint his chest...she totally lost it!"

The two girls began laughing out loud. It only lasted for a few moments before they calmed down, and Nova returned her attention to the photo.

"I just wish David could be laughing with us," Nova said with a sigh. She rested her head against the wall.

"I'm sure he is. Somewhere in the stars, he's got to be." Carthy tugged at the small, stitched-up jacket that Nova was wearing. "I also think he's glad that you fixed his jacket."

"You think so?" Nova asked.

Carthy nodded. She wiped the tear stains on Nova's cheeks with her sweater sleeve and poked the girl's nose.

"I'm sure of it," she said, smiling. "You've also got all these memories you made with him, right? If you keep him in your thoughts, he'll never be far away."

Nova let out a small laugh, wiping her eyes. She took off the jacket and hugged it tightly, rocking from side to side.

"Yeah," Nova whispered. She let go of the jacket and let it rest on her lap. "I couldn't keep being a Mercenary after the Assault, not without him. I don't think I'd have anything I do now if I didn't give that up."

"No kidding. You've got all the cup noodle you could ever eat," Carthy teased.

"It's not just that. I didn't want anyone else getting hurt, and I wanted to tell people what really happened. I didn't think I'd get famous for it, and have these photoshoots and interviews, or be considered some big activist person for peace."

"And your point, Little Ms. Humblebrag?"

"I guess it's just...doing all this almost makes me forget the hurt, even if it never really goes away."

"It may not ever go away. But, maybe it's what we do because of the hurt that matters. Like, we make something out of the lessons that the people we lose give us, or it's a big splash in a lake that turns into a small ripple over time. I'm just spitballing here, stop me if I'm being too cliché."

"No, I like that. I'll never forget David, or how painful all this is. But, because of him, I want to help people even more now. I realized what I wanted to do." Nova got up from her spot on the floor and held Carthy in an embrace. "Thank you, Carthy...I'm glad you're here."

"Me too," Carthy said, returning the hug. "But, I think we've left those movers waiting long enough. How about we talk more about this after we get all those boxes in here?"

Nova nodded, and put her jacket on like a cape, imitating the cartoon character on the side of the company's truck, and his signature stance. "Have no fear, Super Mover is here," Nova quoted before letting out a burst of laughter.

"Well, Super Mover, you can start by moving your super-butt before I run over your super-face," Carthy said, moving back and forth in her wheelchair.

As the two women made their way down the hall, Nova looked at her jacket, then at the ceiling, a soft smile stretching across her face. The bounce in her step seemed to have returned ever so slightly. In a sudden burst of unexplainable enthusiasm, she began to push Carthy's wheelchair, breaking into a full sprint, as laughter and surprised shrieks filled the top floor of the apartment complex.

POETRY | Logan Simonson
WITH NO ONE LEFT HERE

Rust sets into the dead bed springs
They're unused but old and the
Folded sheets are damp with
Moulded creases, and

Dust, particulate bone
Matter mates with droplets
In the sedated air, on silt surfaces
Like sandstone skulls dried up, and

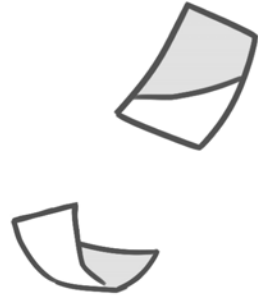
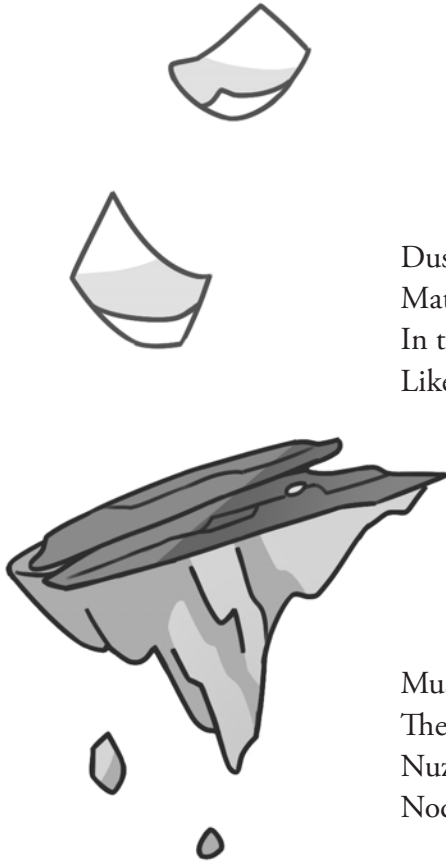
Crust around the eyes of
The windows holds them tight
Shut, like they've recently woken
Up but lack the strength to open, and

Must is here, but
There are no noses to
Nuzzle its naked trailing or
Nod its way in greeting, and

There's no one left here,
Or the next room either, the halls
Have doorways drooping empty over
Carpets that crawled away for good, and

With no one left here, only
The draft's ears ring, shimmying
Through resonant boards, serene;
Though no one's here to hear it, and

So I cannot know, or even guess,
If it's really real, or if all is false and
Crumbled, like paint on the ceiling or
Like the people who left these walls.



LITERARY FICTION | Katy Weicker
HOURGLASS OUT OF REACH

My vision went lazy, cross-eyed, as I stared out the passenger window at the world blurring past me in streaks of colour. I watched the curb whiz by until the unfocused yellow line made me motion sick, forcing me to shift my gaze to the driver's seat.

Luke sat slumped back against the seat. His left hand cupped the steering wheel as his right ran through his mop of blonde hair. "Jesus, Janey. Twenty-five. As of today, you are closer to thirty than twenty."

After almost a quarter century of obligatory friendship, I expected nothing less. Still, the comment stung. Mostly because he was right. I pursed my lips. "I cannot wait until you turn twenty-five."

Luke shrugged. "Getting older is different for men. We get distinguished, you get wrinkled."

I slapped him on the shoulder hard enough for my palm to tingle after.

"Easy!" he yelped, rubbing away the sting of my slap.

"I do NOT have wrinkles."

"They're coming. Like the apocalypse."

I glared at him. "Remind me to send a thank-you card to your mother for having unprotected sex with the mailman."

"Sure. We can pick it up at the drug store with some dye for those grey roots."

"Ok." I eyed his deep, overgrown side part. "Of the two of us, do you really think you are in a position to judge my hair?"

"What's wrong with my hair?" He brushed it off his forehead.

"You look like the product of a boy band/hipster gangbang."

He glowered at me. "You're lucky it's your birthday."

"Love you, too." I tousled his blonde locks. He swatted my hand away.

I smirked as he adjusted his rear-view mirror, his hair, then his rear-view again. After a moment, he groaned. "Fine, Janey. You win." He drew his arm around my shoulder. I leaned into his familiar sweet, earthy scent of cedar and Irish Springs soap.

Being with Luke was easy. Reliable. Our friendship was like a comfortable old sweater that had been dirtied, rewashed, stretched and formed until it fit perfectly. For all the banter and ball-busting, there were moments of effortless silence where we could simply be. I relished these moments. They were flickers of hope that men were good for more than killing spiders and the occasional orgasm.

"How's Miles?" Luke asked. My spine stiffened. Two days prior the question would have made me blush and smile coyly. Now my guts felt like they were simultaneously turning to rock and ash. Luke frowned. "Is there a conversation you feel we should be having here?"

I sat up straight. "Not particularly."

"Want me to kneecap him for you?"

Given the circumstances of the last forty-eight hours, it was a tempting offer. "Men are assholes," I muttered.

"Present company excluded?" Luke clarified.

I just looked at him.

His smile faltered. "What?"

"Apocalyptic wrinkles?"

"Right." He nodded. "Men *are* assholes."

I had learned that fact when my father walked out on my seven-months-pregnant mother, again at nineteen when my first boyfriend broke up with me via text message, and now with Miles. The only thing was, with Miles, I was so sure it would be different. He was so perfect. That should have been my first clue. Six-foot-three, dark hair, and green eyes. Broad-shouldered, well-read, and even

better dressed. The scotch he drank was almost as old as I was, and he smoked a cigar after a particularly long day. We met at a Monet exhibit. I was screwed from the moment I lay eyes on him: blinded by his stupid Master's degree and ability to bench press my ass. He was so flipping perfect—that should have been my first clue—if it's too good to be true, it usually is. Still, even in the aftermath, I couldn't say when exactly our relationship went belly-up. Those defining "aha" moments that one can look back on with twenty-twenty hindsight and say, "shoulda seen that one coming," didn't exist. There were none. No clues that after thirteen months things were going to crumble around me.

In an effort to not think about my latest misgivings, I forced myself to think back to my last birthday—when I was twenty-four and things were so much simpler. Mom, Luke, Miles, and I had all piled into a limo. We had sipped on champagne and recounted our endless childhood shenanigans as we drove an hour to the beach. Fifteen of my nearest and dearest were there waiting for us. We dug into buckets of clams and beer, gorging ourselves until we could barely move. We spent the weekend at the beach, soaking up the last remnants of summer. I had just started working at the museum, Miles was nothing more than a guy I was casually seeing, and my seemingly-healthy mother, diligent as always, had just booked her yearly physical. I missed that time—before relationship conversations, before test results and doctor's appointments. Before everything went to shit.

The pile of ash in my stomach sunk and was replaced by an even greater sensation of nausea. Miles, with all his bullshit, was so trivial. Luke pulled me back over to the safety of his nook. I snuggled in deep and focused on the sensation of his chest rising and falling as he drove in silence. I stayed tucked against his shoulder

until we reached my mom's house. When I moved to sit up, my back seized in protest. I groaned.

Luke turned off the ignition. "You really are getting old."

His jab barely registered. I stared out the car window, my eyes locked on my childhood home. It had always been my safe haven, the one place I could always come back to. Now it filled me with the panicky need to escape to my apartment. The sensation was followed, as it always was, by a wave of remorse that I couldn't be home with Mom every minute of every day: dread, relief, then guilt. A vicious but predictable cycle.

"Do you need a minute?" Luke asked.

A minute, an hour, a year—it wouldn't matter. I could sit in his car forever and it wouldn't make walking through the front door any easier. The ironic part was, the lack of time was what made me dread going in the house to begin with. I could feel it ticking away toward the inevitable. It should have made me want to run toward the door at full speed; instead, it made me want to bury my head back in Luke's shoulder and hide. An all too familiar prickling built in my temples. I tried to blink away the moisture pooling in the trenches of my eyelids.

"Janey?" My name was a gentle nudge back from the detachment I craved.

I went to reach for my seatbelt, only to realize I was holding Luke's hand so tightly my fingertips were numb. I released him from my grip. "Sorry."

"It's ok. I'm a lefty."

We sat in silence for...a minute...an hour...a year...a second. Luke's hand cupped mine again, anchoring me.

I glanced back at the house. "How does she look?"

He squeezed my hand. "The exact same as she did three days ago."

He smiled, that stupid smile that made him

look all of seven years old. Dimples pulled his cheeks into orbs of sunshine, and the dam of pressure behind my eyes drained. The levy burst, streaming down my face in frustrated, hot rivers of hopelessness. My cheeks erupted into tiny volcanoes as Luke watched me melt down in his passenger seat.

Again, we sat. I cried. Luke waited.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the front door to the house open. I sucked back my breath as my mother walked onto the porch. She smiled and waved at us. Luke was right. She looked exactly the same as the last time I saw her. I pressed the heels of my hands into my eye sockets until I saw stars and held my breath. The pressure retreated from my eyes, snaking up into my temples, then down to the base of my skull where it nestled itself into a slow, pulsing pain.

"You ready?" Luke asked.

"Ready or not...." I opened my car door, dragged my leaded limbs from the vehicle, and walked up the front steps.

"Janey Bear!" Mom pulled me into a hug, and I took stock of how easily my arms slipped around her tiny body. I eyed the baggy sweatshirt hanging from her spindly body.

"How are you feeling?" My question was both obligatory and rhetorical. I knew by the bags under her dull blue eyes and her wallpaper-paste complexion exactly how she was feeling. The residual scent of vomit and mint was fresh on her breath.

"Fine." The gauntness in her razor-sharp cheekbones was even more apparent when she smiled. The hollows of her cheeks sunk in against her teeth, like an apple doll, shriveled by age, dehydration, and decay. I opened my mouth, but she quickly cut me off. "Happy birthday, baby. It seems like it was only yesterday that you were born." She made a face. "All nine pounds, six ounces of you." She ushered me through the front door. "My bikini

body was never the same. Hey, Lucky!"

She gave Luke a quick hug and rumbled his hair. I bit my lower lip to keep from laughing as he attempted to smooth it out. Served the asshole right. Mom placed a hand in the small of each of our backs and shepherded us into the foyer.

Nostalgia wafted over me like a perfume as we stepped into the time capsule of my childhood. I shucked my purse off my shoulder and dropped it on the buffet that doubled as both a dumping ground and family heirloom display case. A wonky ceramic bowl I made in fourth grade served as the dividing line between trash and treasure. A glass bird that I bought Mom at a garage sale when I was six had once migrated to the dumping ground and ended up with a chipped beak after being knocked to the ground by Luke's baseball glove. Now, it perched next to my Great-Grandfather's giant brass school bell. The bird, the bell, and his hourglass sat on his wife's giant leather-bound collection of Shakespeare butted up against the wall, surrounded by a wide berth of space to avoid further mishaps. The book was so old the water-stained pages smelled like mothballs and the sand in the hourglass was chunky, incapable of moving through the bottleneck of time. I wasn't entirely sure what classified these as treasure and not trash, but my mother coveted them and threatened me with pain of death if something were to happen to them.

I grabbed the heavy bell and rang it once. A rich, deep chime pealed through the foyer. A satisfying calm quivered through my guts, providing me a nanosecond of relief at the sound. My rogue bell ring was a habit I'd developed when I was finally tall enough to reach the back of the buffet and wanted to display my rebellion. Luke chuckled as Mom swatted me lightly on the ass.

"Little Shit," she mused.

My eyes fell on the collage of framed

photos my mother had chosen to hang in the front hall, most of which highlighted my bucktoothed, chubby face and Luke's horrific acne. I glanced at a photo of my mother around my current age, cradling me as a baby in her arms.

I sucked in a deep breath in an effort to reduce the pressure building on my intercostals. As I inhaled, the sweet, tangy smell coming from the kitchen made my cheeks fill with saliva. "It smells amazing in here...."

"Barbecued beer can chicken and roasted potatoes," Mom rattled off and turned to Luke. "Can you carve the meat?"

He nodded, gave my hand a quick squeeze, and hurried into the kitchen.

"You're supposed to be taking it easy," I reminded Mom.

"Thank you for your concern, but I'm a big girl and I can take care of myself."

"Are you sure?" I asked gently. "I'm just saying, maybe it wouldn't be such a bad thing letting me take care of you for once. I could move back home for a while...."

"Janey." My name escaped my mother's lips as a *tsk*.

"Luke could sublet my apartment...."

"Jane..." she sighed. "How's Miles?"

I wanted to laugh, scream, and cry. All I could manage was a scoff. Mom stared at me, waiting for an explanation. "We broke up," I replied.

"I'm sorry."

"You hated Miles."

"Hate's a strong word, Janey."

"Loathed?"

Her eyes softened. "He just wasn't the one for you."

"For once, you two agree."

"You can do better."

"Why do people say that?" I asked. "Clearly I can't, or I would."

"You *deserve* better," she clarified.

Mom put her arm around my shoulder. I wanted to get lost in the familiarity of her embrace. To forget about Miles and my birthday and all the miserable, inconsequential shit that I knew was nothing compared to what she was going through. I wanted to be five-years-old when the biggest invisible challenge for us to conquer was the pesky monsters living in my closet.

My miserable heart hurt. "He was perfect."

"Clearly he wasn't, or he wouldn't have been stupid enough to let you get away."

I looked at her pitifully. "You have to say that, you're my mom."

"I'd say it even if I wasn't your mom." With that, she dropped an unequivocal kiss on the top of my head.

"Maybe I should just become a nun."

"Honey, I hate to break it to you, but you are destined to fall in love with a wonderful man and produce beautiful babies."

A rush of panic erupted in my core and flashed through my body in a tidal wave of heat and nerves. A single thought rode the wave crashing through my body: fuck Miles. Fuck Miles for depriving me of a wedding, and the opportunity for Mom to walk me down the aisle. Fuck Miles for not giving me babies for my mother to cuddle. His actions robbed me of all the things a relationship could bring. I was single. The clock was ticking, and I was back at square one.

"And I'll see it all," Mom said, reading my mind. Because she was my mother, and because she knew me better than I knew myself. "Just wait, Janey. By this time next year, I'll be back to my over-the-top-crazy-party-throwing self." She took my face in her hands. "I promise."

I couldn't look her in the eyes. "You don't need to promise."

"Yes, I do."

I nodded. Because she needed me to. Because it was the kind of promise parents tell

their children: Santa Claus wouldn't get lost in the snowstorm, the racoon pancaked on the road was just sleeping, the person driving the car wrapped around the telephone pole would be fine, and Mom would beat cancer.

Three weeks after my birthday we found out it had spread to her brain. I immediately moved back home. Four months later Mom passed away.

I slept with Luke the night of her funeral. Maybe it was the grief, maybe it took my mother dying to realize how much of a rock my best friend had become for me. Either way, by my twenty-sixth birthday we were engaged, and I was left kicking myself for not getting drunk and sleeping with him sooner. But some things take longer to figure out than others.

I asked Luke what he thought my mom would think about us. He just laughed and shrugged. "Probably that she saw it coming a mile away."

I told him I resented that she hadn't said anything sooner.

Again, he shrugged. "You wouldn't have listened to her."

I wanted to argue with him, but he was right.

Life's hourglass is out of reach for a reason; some things can't be rushed, no matter how tight the timeline.

SCIENCE FICTION | Cailin Jenkinson
A MATTER OF TIME

*Terra Corps Database - Decommissioned vessels
log: Proximus II*
*The ship was found drifting eighty-thousand
kilometres from Neptune in 2145, with dead
engines and a failed autonav system. Officer Sayra
Wu was declared dead and had presumably been
woken from cryo in response to the Proximus II's
malfunction. Captain Emery Brennan remains in
hibernation.*

Something nudged at Emery's jaw, locking into place, and with a great throaty hiss began to draw the fluid from her aching lungs. Choking, but in reverse. The sensation forced tears from her clenched eyes.

"H-Hey, it's okay! You're okay, the machine's almost done, hang in there."

A hand tentatively slipped into hers and even beneath the numbed layer of her skin, Emery could tell that it was human. After a dragging moment, the mechanism detached from her mouth and Emery was able to suck in a long, shuddering breath of air. Her eyes peeled open, gaze blurry and unfocused. Met with an unfamiliar face, Emery jerked backward and promptly hit her left temple on the corner of the cryopod. She hissed as pain blossomed along that side of her head.

"W-Where a-am I-I?" Emery managed to ask, her voice shaky from lack of usage. "W-When am I-I? Who a-are you-u?"

"You're aboard the Novus Station, orbiting Virris. Year, 2197." Emery craned her sore neck towards the voice, the source a woman dressed in grey slacks, her thick hair pulled back into a loose braid. Emery's stomach folded inward.

"T-There must-t be a m-mistake—" Emery gripped the unsealed rims of the cryopod until her knuckles lost blood. "I-I can't-t be h-here...I

can't be here. This is wrong!"

"Please, calm down. You're safe, I promise." The woman reached a hand out, warmth in her voice. "My name's Danni. We'll figure this out, okay?"

"I-I..."

"You're a captain, yeah?"

"Y-Yeah," Emery replied, growing numb with every passing moment. "Of the *Proximus II*. We were...supposed to prep one of Saturn's moons for terraforming...wait!" Emery's heart lost its rhythm. "W-Where's Sayra?" she asked, desperation steeping on her tongue.

Danni looked unsure of how to respond, but settled on shaking her head, her lips tucking inward. The technician's eyes didn't lift to meet Emery's blurry gaze.

"No. N-No, no, no, please God, n-no!" the captain cried, her hand automatically moving to cover her mouth, as if the action could somehow stifle her pain. A violent sob shook her body. Sayra was dead.

"Your ship malfunctioned and took you guys way past Saturn. Past Neptune," Danni explained slowly, her voice soft. "The autonav woke Sayra to address the issue, but there was... no hope for returning home, at that point."

No reply.

"After Terra Corps recovered your vessel, it was repurposed as a part of Novus Station... over ten years ago. I...only just got permission to wake you."

The sudden flood of information pushed up against an emotional dam in Emery's ears. The only thing on her mind was her wife. Her dead wife.

"S-Sayra never woke me up, d-did she?" Emery's throat wobbled with grief. A few more tears slipped from her tired eyes. "W-When the autonav failed, and the ship thawed the crew, sh-she kept me in cryo."

Emery's face scrunched up in that ugly crying way as Danni confirmed the theory with

a small nod. Emery didn't fight against the arms that encircled her shaking shoulders.



For hours, Emery was inconsolable. Danni left the captain to her thoughts after setting her up with her own living quarters, down the hall from the observatory deck. Eventually, Emery managed to haul herself to the lavatories to shower. Under the water's spray, she wiped her skin clear of the cryoprotectant fluid, grimacing as her pores opened back up to the air. Later, Emery caught a glance of herself in the change room's rust-crusted mirrors.

She looked like the risen dead. Her eyes felt hollow and dark, matching the way her face hung over her cheekbones, as if she had grown new edges in her sleep. Shivering, she carefully dried her sensitive skin with a towel and changed into the pilot slacks Danni had left for her. Every movement of her aching body was calculated and methodical, as if she could hide herself in the simple, controllable task of getting dressed.

Novus Station was eerily dissimilar to her old ship, the *Proximus II*, and Emery couldn't help but feel that the foreign vessel walls were taunting her.

Too late. You're too late, they said.

She returned her gaze to the mirror and trapped herself in a stare.

Ninety-two years too late.

Emery resisted punching the mirror, imagining the way her bones would shudder and crack under the pressure, and resorted to crying instead.

"C-Come back...please. Please. G-God, I can't be w-without you, love...."

Her lips wavered as she gave into a silent scream, head bent low, air moving thickly through her lungs. Emery gritted her teeth as her tears irritated the skin of her cheeks and painted them a blotchy red. Guilt and horror sat heavy in her stomach. She chased the

sensation with a swig of gritty tap water and forced herself to move.

Emery didn't know she was headed for Danni until her feet were lingering at the entrance to the labs. Visibly startled, the technician's eyes lifted to meet Emery's as the captain tentatively entered the room. Emery attempted a smile, but it caught weirdly on her lips. "Thank you," she said, eyes red with salt.

"For what?" Danni swivelled in her chair to face the captain, her face smooth and unlined.

"For waking me up." Emery shifted her weight from foot to foot. "I...I wish it could have been aboard my ship. With Sayra, and my crew. But...I'm still glad. To be alive, that is. So thanks."

"All a part of the job," Danni replied, and smirked, before flattening her mouth. "I mean, you're welcome. I'm...I'm so sorry, Captain Brennan. I can only imagine how hard this is for you."

"Call me Emery, and yeah. I don't want to talk about it...."

Danni nodded, and a silence grew between them.

"Where's *your* captain? I haven't had the pleasure of meeting them yet."

Danni seemed to relax at the question. "His name is Captain Zhao, and he's taken a team to observe the event horizon close-up." Danni's eyes swam with something energetic. "Dangerous. And costly. But, ultimately, worth it for the data."

"Why costly?" Emery asked.

"Well, as I'm sure you're aware, Cap— Emery, gravity has an effect on more than just matter. It affects all planes of our reality, including time."

Emery listened intently, eager for the distraction.

"Captain Zhao is recording the rate of time dilation as his vessel passes around the event horizon."

"But it's a black hole! Won't he get, y'know, sucked in?"

"Not if his team marks their trajectory right, which they will." Danni laughed, and the captain wondered if the confidence in the other woman's voice was false or not.

"Okay, good." Emery still stood by Danni's workstation. "So...what's the time difference, then?"

"At the moment, it should be something like a one to five-hundred-thousand ratio. Every minute for them is a year for us."

"W-Wow," Emery stuttered, awed. "So, you guys will have to wait for a long time then, huh?"

"Yeah, these things take time."

"But...they're worth it?" Emery asked, voice lilting. "Worth waiting for?"

"Absolutely."



Novus Station's dark, tubular hallways weren't claustrophobic, but they were close to it. Emery counted the floor lights that flickered on as she walked the halls. Most days, she found herself wandering between the segmented wings of the station, half-exploring, half-avoiding herself. On more than one occasion, Emery confused a random officer puttering around the labs with Sayra, and every time she snapped back to reality, it hurt. It hurt like nothing she could have ever imagined.

I want to be angry with you, love. But I can't.

She took another random turn, delving deeper into the labyrinthine space vessel.

Because I'd have done the same thing for you.

Emery noticed Danni keeping tabs on her, making sure she ate, slept, and bathed. She would message her a couple times a day to talk about mundane things like breakfast, or the stars. Emery told herself to appreciate the other woman's caring, even if it only made her want to withdraw further.

Everything was just so different. It had been

nearly a month since she'd been thawed, and Emery still struggled to operate a "simple" datapad. Novus Station was monitoring a singularity, after all, and Emery had been in cryo for too long for things not to have changed.

I should leave. Take a ship...somewhere. Somewhere not here.

Her feet stilled.

The black hole. She still hadn't seen Virris yet, opting instead to bury herself in half-hearted study. At the realization, she found herself walking towards the observation deck. To where Danni ate her lunch most days. Puffing out a sigh, Emery slowly approached the panel of quartz glass that was built into the deck's main wall. It was closed.

Raising a shaky hand, Emery activated the blinds and the window rolled open, offering an outdoor view. Almost immediately, the captain was entranced. Virris was massive and seemed to demand the touch of her eyes. Emery had never felt more happily uncomfortable in her life. The singularity was spherical, almost impossibly black. Light wrapped around its warped edges as proof of its deadly event horizon.

There's a lot that I don't know about this place. This time. Do people even live on Earth anymore? This sure as Hell isn't our native solar system.

Questions. Good, smart, reasonable questions. Emery's growing intrigue lifted some of the weight from her shoulders. This was the most okay she'd felt since waking up aboard the Novus. Curiosity twitching in her fingers, she couldn't help but think of her and Sayra as young lovers, musing about the universe as if they could understand it. All the questions they'd asked, discoveries they'd made. The memories were bittersweet, and Emery clung to them like a lifeline.

I'm not okay.

Emery sighed, eyes watering.

But...maybe I will be.

Before she could feel guilty, her comm buzzed, and Emery glanced at the black watch on her wrist. This, at the very least, was technology she could get behind. Danni was calling her. Rubbing her neck, the captain withdrew from the window and started walking toward the labs.

"Danni, hey," Emery answered, keeping her voice light. "What's up?"

"Oh, nothing much, just interpreting some data." Emery could hear the click of a datapad in the background of their call. "Thought I'd call and see what you're up to."

"Actually, I finally went to see the black hole." Emery hoped that Danni could hear the smile in her voice. "It's...breathtaking."

"Isn't it?" Danni agreed, and the typing noise stopped. "I've been here ten years and never get tired of seeing it."

Emery nodded, not that Danni would've been able to see it.

"Danni, can I ask you a question?"

"Shoot."

Emery stared out into the darkness, as if through sheer willpower alone she'd be able to see Captain Zhao's vessel as it studied the singularity. Unsurprisingly, the ship was nowhere to be seen; the space between them and the *Novus* was too great.

"Can I wait here with you?" Emery whispered, eyes tracing the light around the event horizon. "For your captain to return, I mean."

"I'd...like that."

SCIENCE FICTION | Mackenzie Moisan
THE COFFEE SHOP AT THE
END OF THE WORLD

Crimson sky.
Looking up, one would think the Devil himself painted the canvas with blood. I grasp the cross around my neck and pray for God's protection, so that I may guide a few of his children in this time of need. Most of the townsfolk are at the chapel, so God shall provide for them, but I have a feeling where a few more might be.

Making my way down the empty street, I can't help but notice how lonely the town looks. Sarah's flower shop, the Browns' bakery, the Taylor family garage—all long left behind, the dark interiors seemingly mourning the loss of their owners. Cars and trucks remain neatly parked as though it's a normal day like any other. The trees remain still, apart from the gentle breeze that whispers its solemn apology. As I reach the head of Main Street, the open sign in a single storefront glows like a guiding neon star for those seeking a final comfort. Stuart's café.

The pleasant ring of bells signals my entrance, at which six faces bearing empty smiles welcome me. The countdown on the wall-mounted television warns of the three hours we have left as the asteroid's descent is pictured above. Grabbing once more at my cross, I produce my bravest smile and walk to the family sitting at the window.

A look of guilt breaks the parents' facades as I approach, and the mother's gaze shifts to the floor as she speaks. "Father Joseph. I-I'm sorry we didn't go to the church. I-It's just that with the kids a-and—"

"No need to apologize, Abigail. As long you hold honour and respect for God in your heart, He will never leave you. I know you and John

are doing what's best for young Aster and Lily; after all, a crowded church is only going to worry them."

"Thank you, Father." John breathes a sigh of relief. "When you walked in, I thought you had come to scold us. By the way, if you're here, then who's leading mass?"

"I had Father Tom lead in my place. He is quite the respectable man, especially in times such as this."

I feel a light tugging at my robes. "Mister Father Joseph?"

"Ah, yes. What is it you'd like to know, young Aster?" I say softly as I bend down to the boy's level.

"Mommy says...that we can see God soon. Is he a nice person?" The innocence in his eyes rips into my heart, as he knows not the implications of his words.

Preserving my smile the best I can, I answer. "Of course. He loves and cares for us all, so don't worry. He'll be happy to see you."

Aster's face beams at this response, striking an even greater pain in my heart. Poor child. Standing up, I leave the family to start their prayer and walk to the counter where Stuart, just finished serving another man, is waiting.

"I was beginning to wonder if you were going to show." His chipper tone is a nice change of pace compared to the last few days—even if it is forced.

"Thought I would enjoy one last cup before I go see the Lord."

He turns and begins to prepare my drink. "Sure thing. Although I do have something stronger if your god allows it."

"I'm sure he wouldn't mind, but I've been sober so I could enjoy all the time I've had. Why change now?" I'm glad Stuart is here. He's always brought some levity to my darkest moments.

The rich smell reaches my nose as my usual coffee is placed before me. "Don't worry 'bout



the price. Let's just say it's on the house." We both chuckle at that. Stuart slowly shifts his gaze to the television. "Good thing this is a small town, otherwise I'd be worried 'bout looters. Have ya heard 'bout some of the things going on in the cities? Damn nasty stuff."

"The fear of death brings out one's inner demons." I take a sip of the bitter brew before me. "Even the most devout man of God can suffer this."

"What 'bout you?"

"I have friends like you to keep me in line."

Just as our conversation is picking up, the other man at the counter speaks. "Excuse me, Father?"

"Hm? Rodney, right? What is it you need?"

Rodney starts fidgeting with his ring. "If I could ask a favor? I-I w-would like to confess some sins."

Nodding, I extend my arm to him. "Of course. God is always willing to listen to one of his children wishing to repent. If you would like, we could go outside where—"

"No, no, no. It's fine in here. I...just want to get it out there." With Rodney now shaking, I worry about what he'll confess.

"Very well. If that is what you want, then you're free to do so."

"Ok...uh. Here goes. Forgive me Father, for I have sinned." I see the tears form in his eyes. What did he do? "I-I slept with a woman who was not my wife. I don't know why I did it, I just...I don't know. But that isn't even the end or the worst as I...I have had several affairs with multiple women."

"God, Rodney," Stuart interjects. "Does Sarah know about this?"

"She found out yesterday. She said...she said that she hated me. That she'd rather die alone than have me there." He's now completely in tears, supporting his head in his hands. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Sarah! Oh God, I'm sorry!"

I'm at a loss for words. I would've never

expected Rodney to commit an act of adultery. Mustering up some resolve, I speak. "I see. You have fallen into lust and committed the sin of adultery against your wife. This is a serious act and goes against the teachings brought to us by the Lord, although through this confession you have taken a step towards redemption. It is not my place to cast judgement as it will be the Lord who does so; however, the Bible shows us that God believes in forgiveness. So if you are willing to accept God's forgiveness and truly desire to redeem yourself, then you might be forgiven. Now go to your wife. If your love for her is truly not a lie, then show that to her. Be there to comfort her in this harrowing time."

"Thank you, Father." He lifts his tear-flooded face, his eyes now fully alive with hope and determination.

"Do not thank me, for it is God who grants this chance."

"Thank you, Lord!" And with that Rodney stands up and runs outside as we watch his journey down the street.

"I hope he'll be okay," says the sympathetic Stuart. "Do you really think he'll be forgiven?"

"If he is willing to work for and accept it, then yes." I turn to the family who are staring at us in confusion at the loud commotion.

"Let's not have this sour our spirits, so we may meet God not in sorrow, but in happiness."

So as the seconds tick by, we talk and make our peace and when our time finally comes, we greet our fate with open arms.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Rachelle Elisabeth Bramly is a writer, poet, diarist, collage-artist, farmhand, tarot reader, observer, initiator, creator, lover, and an all-round awesome person. A former Camosun College student, Rachelle is currently studying poetry, creative nonfiction, photography, and video art at the University of Victoria. This is her second publication in *Beside the Point*.

Brie Fennell is a student at Camosun College. When she was young, Brie would read novels to escape into amazing worlds. Later she started writing as a way to create worlds for herself, where she could be and do anything she pleased. Now she hopes to share her work with you.

Brittany Flynn is an avid reader, interested in the study of human eccentricities. She has no formal literary education and uses writing primarily as a facet for her own adverse emotions. She imagines her work can often appear obscure and somber, although she is fascinated by tales of human endearment and hopes to portray this in her writing as well. She is inspired and encouraged by the love of her mother, brother, and grandparents as well as her little dog, Willis.

Anthea Gaunt is a singer, writer, student, and homemaker who likes to shake her Victoria lifestyle up with travel and self-exploration whenever possible. She is excited for the opportunity to be a part of *Beside the Point* for her second year running and looks forward to seeing the finished publication!

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. He was recently published in *New Plains Review*, *Stillwater Review*, and *Big Muddy Review* with work upcoming in *Louisiana Review*, *Columbia College Literary Review*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

Truly Hunter is a Victoria native currently attending Camosun College. She is the author of many short stories and is currently working on her first novel. As a student of creative writing, Truly can usually be found with her nose in a book, or putting pen to paper. But when she's not writing, or thinking about writing, Truly loves to play video games and spend time with her loved ones while enjoying inspiring art and locales. Truly posts self-published short stories, articles, and updates on her blog, www.trulyhuntercreative.weebly.com.

Cailin Jenkinson is an aspiring author and visual artist from Victoria. She's studying Comics and Graphic Novels at Camosun College, and plans on pursuing a career in graphic design. She drinks several cups of tea a day and loves living by the ocean. A self-proclaimed sci-fi enthusiast, Cailin spends much of her free time drawing, reading, and writing about space.

Isabella Kennedy stumbled upon poetry at Douglas College during her first year of sciences, a chance meeting that changed her life and the path she was on. Since then her work has been published in *Pearls 37*, and in August of 2017 one of her poems was recognized as Douglas College's Poem of the Month by their creative writing department. She currently attends Camosun College and hopes to continue writing and publishing poetry.

Bailey Legare is a Camosun College student. She has been writing stories for ten years now and has taken several creative writing courses. Only a couple of her stories have been brought to full completion and polished. She enjoys several other pastimes along with writing, such as photography, art, and avid reading.

Georgia Ma is a student in the Comics and Graphic Novels program and new to the world of creative writing despite the overflowing bookshelves in their home. Their talents include being good at things that don't come in handy very often like riding the unicycle and advocating for the Oxford comma.

Benjamin Longshot McFee, originally from Medicine Hat, Alberta, is an author, performer and playwright. His play *A Brief History of Tomorrow* (in which "The Final Flight of the *C.S.S. Starlight*" is set) was produced for Lethbridge's *CASA On Stage* program. His poem "Sestina for Standing Rock" was published in the 2017 edition of *Beside the Point*. His academic credits include a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Lethbridge, a certificate in Medical Office Assistance from Camosun College, and a current focus on writing and history (in particular, American history, and World War II). He lives in Victoria with his partner.

Tim Migeon is a Camosun student in his second year of studying creative writing. He's part of the *Beside the Point* editorial committee for the second time. He's looking forward to reading the finished book and displaying it on his bookshelf with pride. He hasn't had any of his work published before and hopes this will be the start of a rewarding career. He aspires to write screenplays for TV and feature-length films.

Julia Ming is a student majoring in biology and psychology with the goal of going into medicine. Her writing is a hobby, used as a creative outlet to define strong emotions through personal experience. She believes strong writing will make the reader feel the same way the writer does. She hopes to tie together medicine and writing in a way that can speak to many, specifically in the realm of addiction psychology.

Mackenzie Moisan is a student in the Camosun College creative writing program where he hopes to write novels, graphic novels, and screenplays. This is his first time being published, and he plans on submitting to other publications in the future. He often spends his time wandering aimlessly around his home city of Victoria searching for inspiration for his writing endeavors.

Nessa Pullman is a magazine editor and aspiring novelist. She has been writing interior design columns for *GRAY* magazine since 2014. A curious girl by nature, Nessa has always been drawn to hearing and telling stories, believing that our stories are what make us inspiring, and we could all use a little more inspiration in our lives.

Cameron Simo is a UVic student with the plan of teaching English. He's an aspiring author, currently working on a novel titled *Taplica*, starring his characters Nova, David, and Carthy. He is very honoured to be published in this issue of *BtP* and congratulates all of the other wonderful writers who made the cut.

Logan Simonson is a literature student who occasionally drops his reading to pick up a pen. His poetry is more a texture than a tale. An aural photography that's been slightly blurred. His muses range from the sound of ice to the taste of lace. His inspiration is drawn from language poetry and modernism.

Rachel Smith is a Canadian illustrator and cartoonist. A passionate feminist, she loves exploring equality through reading and writing science fiction and fantasy. In her free time, she can be found snuggling with her husband and her two cats. You can catch more of Rachel's work at artbyrachels.tumblr.com.

Avalon Suriano is an aspiring writer who lives in Victoria, BC. She likes to find inspiration for her pieces in her everyday life within this coastal community. As she works towards an Arts and Science Degree, she can't wait to see what is in store for her in the future.

Benjamin Weick is a student at Camosun College and is still figuring out his future, though his current path of choice is moving towards becoming an editor or a publisher. He is a longtime reader and occasionally writes as a hobby. He currently lives in Esquimalt with his parents and dog.

Katy Weicker has a passion for honest, character-driven story-telling. A dental receptionist by day, writer by night, she has spent the last two years at Camosun as a University Transfer student, focusing her studies on creative writing. She is excited (and a little sad) to be moving on to UVic in Fall 2018 to continue chipping away at her BFA and honing her skills as an author. Most recently, Katy's nonfiction piece "Drowning on Dry Land" appeared in *BC Teacher's Magazine*.

Bonnie Weisz recently relocated to idyllic Ladysmith, British Columbia, following a career as a professional writer and journalist in Ontario and Victoria. She started writing poetry when she was fourteen, moved by the political events of the 1960s, and through poetry has continued to reflect upon events of the day, and day-to-day life, in a way she hopes resonates with other souls. She now spends much of her time volunteering, creating jewellery, and writing poetry in the hope that the latter will assuage, if not save, her soul.

BESIDEThe Point

Putting emotions into motion • TIME ISSUE

