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805, a literary and arts journal, was founded in 2015 from the Manatee County Public Library System's commitment to promote the vast creativity of our community and beyond. The Library's mission is to nurture imagination, promote lifelong learning, and enrich the community.

"805" is the Dewey Decimal number for literary journals. The subject breakdown is:

800 Literature & rhetoric
805 Serial publications

We're looking for prose, poetry, and art that is unexpected, striking, and moving. We accept submissions from residents of Manatee County and the rest of the universe. Submissions are accepted year-round, and there is no fee to submit. Please submit works not published elsewhere. Submissions can be made at www.805lit.org/submissions.html.

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Lit + Art Journal

Volume 2, Issue 2

2016

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From the Editor

Being a part of this journal for the past year and a half has been an amazing experience. The quality of the work that we have received is extraordinary, and there have been moments where it felt almost impossible to choose what we would publish. In this, our fifth issue, you will find writing and art that is remarkable. The wide range of style and tone among the writing is truly exceptional. Their prose will take you from early twentieth century Russia to present day, from love and loss to joy. The artists we've included used everything from gouache to ink to cardboard in order to create their pieces. The result is art that is striking, playful and full of color. Featured on the cover is "Papita the Beast" by Yanuary Navarro, a talented and imaginative illustrator who creates stories through her work.

As an editor, it's incredibly humbling to watch so many submissions come in from so many talented people. You have chosen to share your voices, visions and stories with *805*, so that we can in turn share them with the world. I am very grateful to be a part of something so special, and I hope that you, the readers, are as moved by the beauty of these works as I am.

Courtney DeSear
Editor

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**Papita
the
Beast**
World of Wolli
Yanuary Navarro

Bow Heads
World of Wolli
Yanuary Navarro



Sirena

Cyn Bermudez

The siren is alone,

aislado

—nestled away in an ocean cave,
obscure, unknown,
anomalous.

Her secrets ebb and flow un-ciphered:
What will the fish sing today?

The woman on the boat sings
a single melodic refrain. She serenades
the ichor of giants, *la sangre*.

And paints on a canvas,
a young girl falling away
from a steep ocean cliff, her life
across the sky. *Las estrellas*
hidden in the moonlight of her captivity
breaks the flesh colored chains.

Little Birch Tree

An excerpt from the forthcoming novel *The Matroshka Doll*
Courtney Prather

St. Petersburg, Russia
1907

When I was nine years old, my mother took me into the beating heart of St. Petersburg to try out for the Imperial School of Ballet. While we waited I was entranced by the golden whorls of a chandelier, one of the first and certainly the largest, electric lights I had ever seen. My grandmother, mother, and I survived by the light of candles, and the icon oil lamp ever lit beneath the gaze of the Holy Mother Theotokos. Back then, indoor electricity ran in veins throughout the city, first to the royals and nobility, thinning out like capillaries just short of the poor neighborhoods. I didn't know if I'd ever be in that hall again and I was struck by the electricity magic, its bright, lemony glow.

Waiting for my number to be called was unbearable. Sitting in that high ceilinged room, I felt like a little stone at the bottom of a coursing river. I gnawed at my fingernails until Mamochka brushed my hand away. She'd not said a word since we arrived and had done nothing to ease my discomfort. She sat stiffly in her only suit: a puffy shouldered kazachock with a matching skirt, her hands folded neatly over the papers securing my Russian citizenship. The other

mothers wore velvet, high-collared dresses with skirts that trailed across the room as lingering as their eyes. I realize now Mamochka must have felt as much a fish out of water as I.

We waited, too anxious to speak, on an emerald green fainting couch pushed up against the wall, too afraid to touch anything or even to step on the Oriental rug beneath our feet. At home, the threadbare tapestries that insulated our walls were so old they might have passed through our family since the time of Ivan the Terrible.

Dozens of girls walked about bare-chested in the tryout uniform: a pair of brown tights. Without the chignon and dainty movements, we were indistinguishable from little boys. Outside the courtyard window, the golden dome of St. Isaac's Cathedral hovered high in the distance, floating above the winter haze of Petersburg.

Over and over again, the trial room door opened and a girl ran out, her chest flushed, her face splashed with tears. She'd either sprint or slouch weepily down the hall toward her mother, hysterically crying or resting her head into her mother's breast. Only about once every fifty girls did a triumphant one burst into the hall, squealing ecstatically. I felt the blood drain from my stomach to my toes. The attending woman in brown wool stepped out of the trial room door and called out, "Two hundred and seventeen!"

I jumped at the shout of my number. Mamochka walked me up and handed her my calling card with my number and papers. The woman yanked the papers and flopped them shut, tilted her head back and appraised me. Mamochka kissed my forehead and whispered, "*Всё в руках божьих.*" *Everything is in God's hands now.*

I followed the woman in wool into the room. A panel of listless judges leaned on a mahogany table covered with pencils and notebooks. Light echoed on the bare floor where I guessed I would be asked to stand. In the corner sat a black piano and a grey-suited manservant behind it, as much a piece of furniture himself.

"Come here number two seventeen. Stand in the center," a judge called. He wore a navy suit with gold buttons. His hair was greased back from his gaunt face, cheekbones slung from his eyes as if he hadn't slept in weeks. I did as I was told and stood bone straight in the center of the room as they surveyed my body. Someone took my height measurements, 1.24 m, and weight, 24 kg, from a glinting silver scale and ruler.

“What’s the leg to torso ratio?” a judge asked. The measurer read the height ruler and called out, “Forty-five to sixty,” she said.

“Poor,” the thin man grumbled, and jotted a note in his chemise. The chill of the room breathed over me, and my nipples, the color of a pink ruble note, rose. I reached to cover them by crossing my hands over my chest.

“Raise your arms,” a dour woman called. Her hair was toppled in a grey mound secured by a sequined broche, and a black shawl draped her shoulders. I raised my arms in a soft oval shape, the way Baba had shown me. She’d seen the performances of traveling ballet troupes over her many years and she took on the role of my instructor. “Don’t just throw your arms up. *Pose* them,” she had said.

“*Relever*,” the gaunt man ordered, testing my French, the language of the nobility. I ascended onto my toes.

“Come down. Lift your leg forward,” he said.

I pointed my toes upward until my leg was a straight line parallel to the floor.

“Can you go no higher than that?”

I lifted it higher still, until it felt like strings in my thigh tightened.

“Dina, check her extension,” the old woman said.

A wiry maid in aprons approached me and I covered my bare chest again. She pointed a finger at my leg and reached for my ankle. She raised it in the direction of the judges, then to the side, then from the back to show how high my leg could reach. I felt like a horse being measured before auction.

“Arches,” another judge ordered.

Dina took a metal contraption from the table and held it up to my foot. She pushed the cold metal ruler against the hollow of my foot. Her eyes flickered up at me, then strained into a frown. She called out, “Six and a quarter centimeters.”

“Six?” the old woman asked incredulously. Her sequined broche glistened. A flash of terror pulsed in me. Was that good or bad? I had no idea what they were measuring or talking about. But Dina gave a perfunctory nod, measured the other foot, and bowed to the judges.

“Thank you, Dina,” said the sole male judge. Dina went to her place beside the selectors. The man asked me where I was from.

“Petersburg, sir.”

“I can tell. There’s a slight hint of ash on your face.”

“I washed good and clean, sir.” He winced at something I said, or perhaps the way I had said it. My pronunciation then was of the lowest quality, with swings in my tone and raw pronunciations the nobles did not carry. Mamochka could not afford to send me to school on her wages as a hotel laundress and so I learned to speak from those around me, people of the dirt.

“Where in Petersburg are you from, girl? Are you near the *factories*?” he prodded.

“Ligovka,” I said quietly.

The judges passed glances at each other. I had grown up in the weeds of the city, in a slum called Ligovka where the poor were stacked upon each other like bricks, swallowing dust and soot. There were many poor neighborhoods of the city, but mine was notoriously derelict. When wages were low, my friend Tasha was told by her mother to stand near the street and wait for a man in a carriage to offer her ten rubles.

“Why do you want to be in the school?” a woman asked. She sat beside the male judge and had said nothing thus far. She wore black hair drawn back, revealing pert eyes that looked the deepest shade of blue. Her eyes burned through my naked chest and I felt as I did at confession; as though my confessor could see through my soul. I wondered how to answer such a small question with a desire as deep as the sea.

On my last birthday, Mamochka had a chance to buy the cheap seats that were heckled out on street corners to fill up the theater the day of a performance. For several months she’d woken early, left me behind in our lumpy mattress, and headed for the Grand Hotel Europe as the bulbous sun rose above St. Isaac’s Cathedral, and she did not return until after the cathedral struck night. She saved enough kopecks to buy two tickets to the Imperial Ballet’s production of *Sleeping Beauty*. The kaleidoscopic ballet enraptured me as I watched from the dark eaves of the theater on a splintered bench, my little hand clutched around Mamochka’s dry, calloused hand.

After my ballet christening, I could think of nothing else. I twirled around the musty parquet for Baba, who reminded me to point my dust-frosted toes. I weaved through the current of

migrating workers that flooded the morning streets, summoned by the smokestack factory sirens like worshippers to prayer.

Immigrants with varicolored faces hooted at me like owls from the scaffolding of edifices as I pranced toward the market to buy Mamochka flour and milk. I kept the memory of the ballet in a locket under key within the deepest chamber of my heart.

An interminable silence stretched between the judges and me. I swallowed the hot spit in the corners of my mouth.

"I want to be Beauty," I said.

The gaunt man pursed his lips and shifted in his seat. The woman with black hair stared back at me, her brow crinkled sardonically.

"You think you're the only one?" she asked. "You're only number two hundred and seventeen. There are hundreds more after you who want it just as badly."

"Not like I do," I blurted, and winced. I was certain I was moments from being thrown out. "I have prayed for it," I said meekly.

Her face cracked as she expelled a breath of laughter. "Do you think Theotokos will answer your prayers?"

I stared blankly, not knowing what to say. I now understood why Mamochka had dreaded the tryouts, afraid of how I would be scrutinized. Baba stuck her nose up to Mamochka's disapproval, reciting proverbs she'd learned in the fields of her youth. The two fought over my willingness to tryout for months after my birthday.

"Don't get your hopes up on a silly whim," Mamochka had said from the sink, her arms soaked to the elbow as she spun rags over dishes.

"Don't kill her dreams yet. She's young!" Baba had said. "When you were three years old I thought we would die in those wheat fields. Die or be separated, bought and sold like pigs. One year later and we were freed. So much can happen in a lifetime, Maria."

Mamochka stood spine straight, her neck stiffened. "I wouldn't have taken her if I'd known she would have gotten all these ideas," she said sternly to the wall.

Baba's eyes narrowed at her daughter. She nudged her stick-like elbow into my gut and said beneath the scraping of potatoes, "Don't listen to her. *Артельный горшок уже кипит.*" *With a helper, a*

thousand things are possible. Her eyes glittered and she pointed a finger at herself.

"Enough talking." The old lady judge interrupted my thoughts. "Let's see her dance already."

I looked at the pianist behind the immense instrument in the corner. He glanced down at the slip of paper that had my song request. He squinted, looked up at me, and then the judges. I had requested a song that no one else would: a lovely folk song written by the Slavs long ago about a little birch tree. It was my favorite of all the songs Mamochka sang while she scrubbed potatoes.

I got into position, my toes pointed out wide as could be, my arms rounded over my thighs. The pianist began with an arpeggio of high notes, soft and meek, and the words came to me, keeping my time.

Standing in the field, little birch tree

Waving in the breeze, little birch tree

Loo lay loo, little birch tree

Loo lay loo, little birch tree

I traced the floor in circles with my toes. I twirled around, and reached one arm forward, the other to the side, my leg raised fully behind me. This, I later learned, was called an arabesque. Baba said to arch my back as if I held the crest of the moon between my shoulder blades. My appraisers' eyes remained dead and empty, but I held my smile.

See the lovely birch in the meadow,

Curly leaves all dancing when the wind blows.

Loo lee loo, when the wind blows,

Loo lee loo, when the wind blows.

The song notes faded and I stood in the quiet room, my breathless panting the only sound. My hands seized into fists when I realized that my fate would soon be delivered. A bomb could have gone off outside and I wouldn't have noticed, I waited so raptly for the judges to say something.

The thin, tired man and the old woman handed their notes to the black haired judge in the center. She looked hesitantly down

at my birth certificate and back at me. I was certain she knew that I was a poor child that could be seen sprinting through the urchins of a bad street in a cloud of dust. Her glistening blue-black eyes scared me, but I beckoned to her with mine. She turned to the tired man beside her. He raised an eyebrow and glanced across at the old woman who nodded. The young woman's eyes glossed over me again.

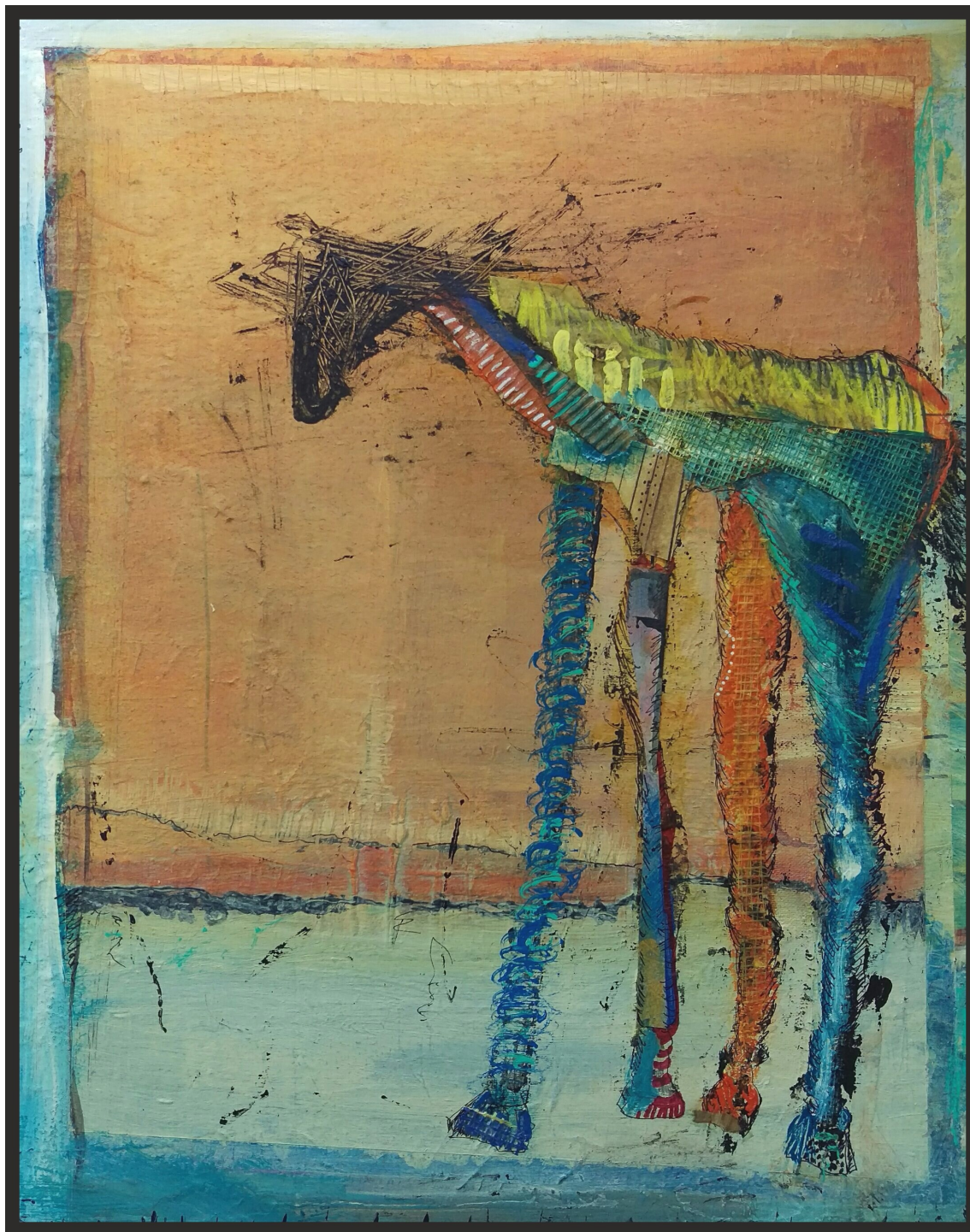
“Say your prayers of thanks tonight, two seventeen. Take your acceptance instructions and be off. Next,” she called.

I felt like I had taken flight. My breath became easy and there was the faintest threat of tears. I had to tell Mamochka. I ran out of the room, shouting “Spasibo!”

Back in the hall, I searched through hundreds of bobbing chignons for Mamochka, and found her sitting on the same cushion as before, her head bowed reverently in prayer. I bolted toward her, and before I even reached her she looked up. Her dark eyes, shaped then as mine are now, were wide and expectant. When she saw my face, she raised a hand to cover her parted lips.



Horse
Cheryl Kinderknecht



Alzheimer's

M. Drew Williams

If he chooses to think about the beauty of a forest
he must also consider that somewhere within one
an ax is chipping away at softening bark.
In its agony, this imperiled tree forgets

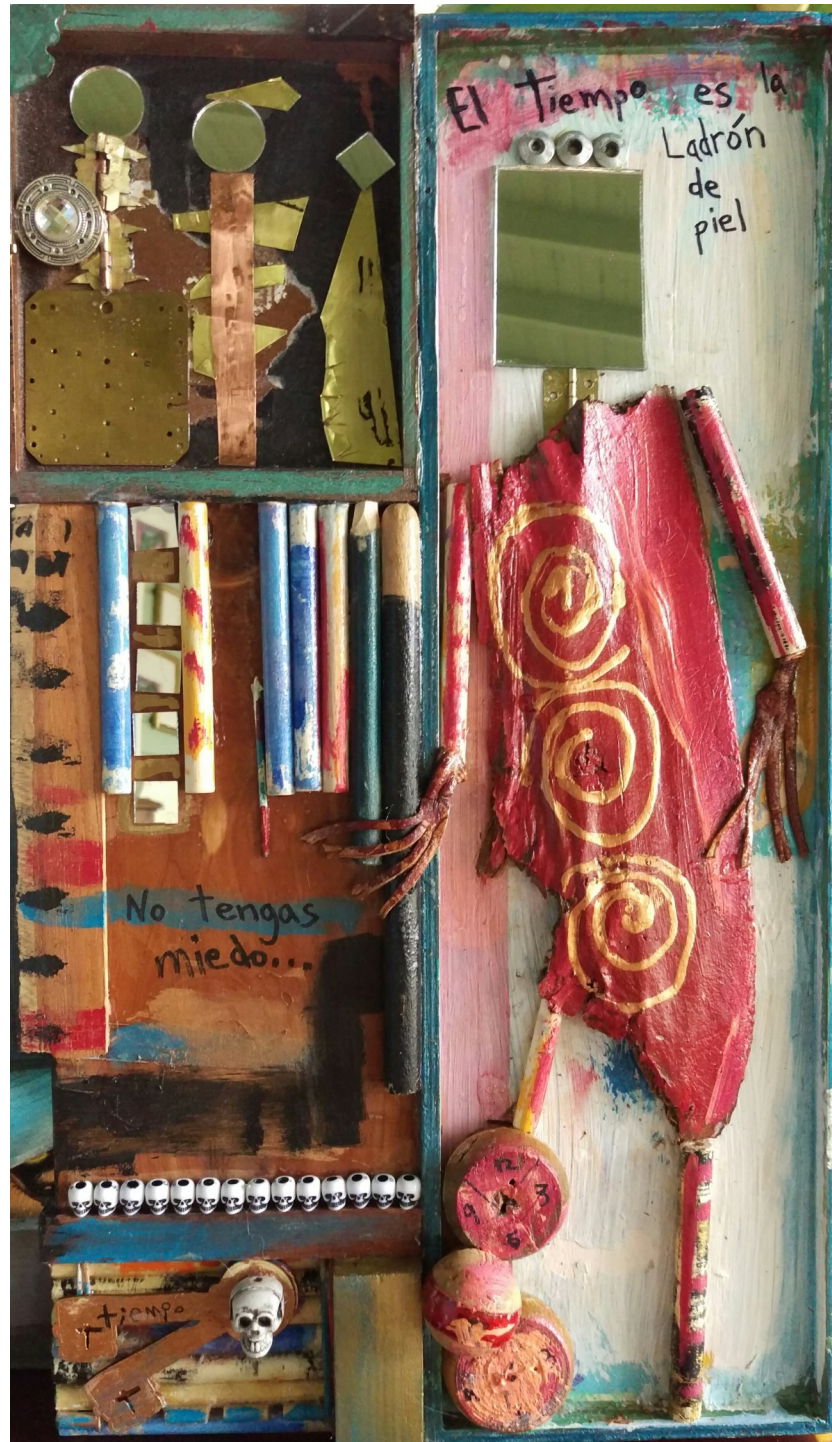
the pair of lovers who routinely picnicked
beneath its shade. It forgets the anecdotes
they candidly exchanged about their childhoods;
some were cherished, others were scarring.

When he then chooses to contemplate the sound
of a toppling oak, her petite voice is what
comes to his mind; the same one that praised the
lunches he made, placed neatly into an old basket.

This voice now belongs to a woman who
once loved him. She struggles to conjure his name.
With a trunkless expression,
she questions how the hell he knows hers.

Skin Thief

Cheryl Kinderknecht



Let Me Tell You A Story

Allison Sobczak

The boy watches his mother wither away in her bed. Her body has deteriorated, shedding away the round and rosy flesh that was as smooth as buttermilk. Now it stretches taut across her bones like a suit. Sunken eyes and sunken cheeks stare up at the ceiling from a sunken face, and she is so small; small like a baby bird nestled in the sheets. She does not look over at the boy.

The boy sits in a straight-backed chair right next to the bed. His feet dangle. A book is resting on his lap, and he waits for a sign that his mother is listening, that she knows he is there. But she continues to look up and away from him.

Before his mother was confined to her bed, when she could walk and smile and laugh and cry, the boy's mother would read to him. She would sit cross-legged on his bed, one of her cotton dresses draped over her knees, and the boy would squeeze into the empty space between her crossed legs. She'd hold the book in front of the two of them and he would turn the pages. His mother's voice was like a glass of water, cool and refreshing and smooth. Sometimes, she'd rest her chin on the boy's shoulder, her mouth pressed to his ear as she played around with different voices for the characters. Her breath tickled the shell of his ear and he would

giggle and turn his head into her soft arm. He's never felt more happy and safe than when he was with her reading.

But his mother hasn't read to him in a long time.

When she got sick, the reading had to stop. And the boy's father never read to him. He didn't do much of anything with the boy.

But the boy was smart. He was able to follow along with his mother's voice to the words on the page, watching as over time the black, printed characters and symbols became familiar letters and words. He could mouth the words out loud, his pointer finger hovering over the words as he saw the images they provoked. In his mind, the stories he read played out like a movie; stories of lavish, glittering parties, stories of children and their growth into adulthood, stories of worlds with monsters and fantastical creatures that roamed and lived among the humans. These were the stories his mother had shared with him.

He scoots his chair closer to his mother's bed. The book on his lap is a deep red color and weighs heavily on his thighs. Gold lettering dances across the cover in a flowing script. It reminds the boy of his mother's handwriting that he found on notes tucked into his lunch box, or scrawled across a gift tag. It's why the boy chose this book, because then he can imagine that his mother wrote it for him.

He starts in on the first chapter, keeping his voice level and loud enough for just his mother to hear. When he comes to the close of the first chapter and prepares to begin the second, he glances up at his mother. She blinks at the ceiling. It is the first sign of movement she has made since the boy first came into the room.

Very slowly, almost mechanical, she turns her head towards the boy. Her eyes are still fixated on the ceiling, but her face is turned towards the boy like a flower towards the sun, like she wants to absorb the words into her very skin. The boy's voice had drifted off into silence, and there was a small beat before the mother finally, finally, focuses her gaze on him.

"Jacob," she says. Her voice has changed. It isn't the one that read him his stories. This voice is not strong; it is a weak whisper, parched, brittle and cracked at the edges, a voice from a desert with no water in sight. But it is this voice, this tiny, feeble voice, that says the boy's name, and it seems like such a long since he heard his name on his mother's lips.

“Jacob,” she repeats. “Why did you stop reading?”

He hadn’t even realized that his voice faded away when his mother moved. “I don’t know,” he says. “I thought you were going to say something.”

His mother shakes her head slightly, a faint brush on the pillow. “No. I wasn’t going to say anything. I’m sorry. Please. Keep reading.”

The boy looks back down at the page where he stopped, but he finds it difficult to start again. For some reason, it was easier for him to read before when he didn’t think his mother was listening.

Before he can start again, his mother moves her arm out from underneath the covers. It is long, thin and white, and with her hand she gently pats the space next to her. “Here, Jacob,” she says. “Come lay with Mommy.”

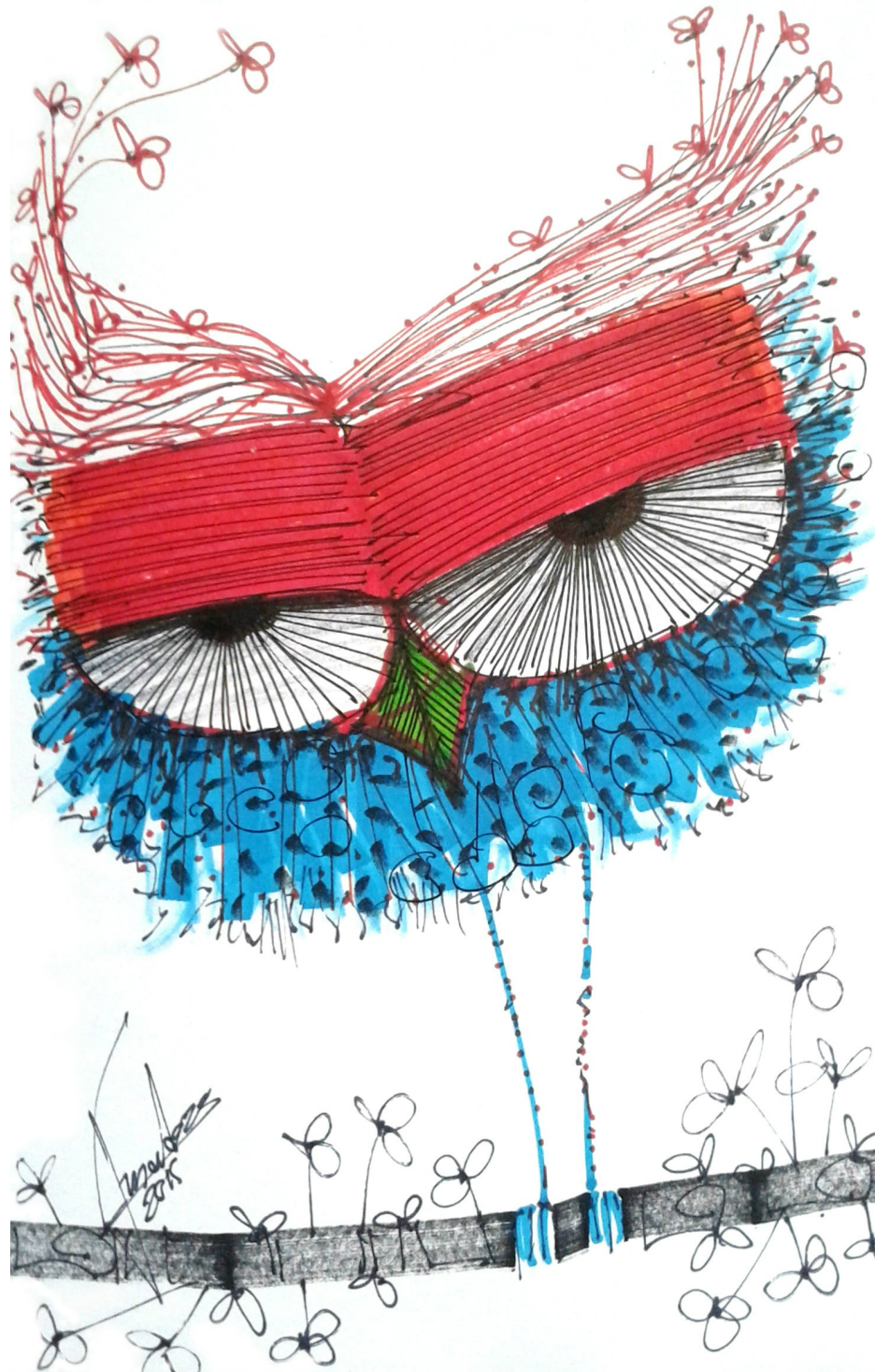
The boy has not touched his mother since she got sick, but her illness does not stop him from scrambling onto the covers and laying down next to her. When he’s settled, she turns completely on her side, placing her arm over his stomach. Her breath puffs out, light and warm, against his neck. The boy is no longer sitting in his mother’s lap, but laying there beside her makes no difference. It is still the safest place he has ever known.

“Go ahead, Jacob.” Her arm tightens around him with the little strength she has. “I’m listening.”

So the boy reads to his mother.



Owl 2
From Happy, Sad,
and Nostalgic Owls
Jorge Mendoza





Owl 5
From Happy, Sad,
and Nostalgic Owls
Jorge Mendoza

Ephemeral

Hannah Warren

Broadcasts, newscasts, podcasts, sixty days in an arm cast. The stock market plummets, but suicide rates skyrocket. A suit with a cocaine smile divines his equipage of red and blue arrow fish darting across a map of global heat waves. They say a man in Mississippi can never die of thirst because the humidity can tip the edge of a tumbler with stagnant water. I knew nothing of meteorology and less of stock exchange percentages.

I knew of scaly-back lizards with iridescent tails. Branches were smoother than river stones, shaped by the caresses of groping fingertips, climbing skyward in a tree planted as a dwarf holly bush. I knew the whispers of daffodils and crystallized rain sheets. My sister taught me to leave imprints of lullabies; I could rattle the rust-encrusted shed like summer thunder with only a handful of green acorns, gathered from seedless moss below the oaks that droop with the weight of a thousand thousand children. I have become entrenched in paper desire. Was I harvested

from the morning dew
beneath tired, wooden bridges
before I had ripened?



Lo Que Deja Atrás
Jorge Mendoza

The Evening of Saying Goodbye

Steve Klepetar

We talked in the garden until sun
boiled our words to steam. Then we
could climb no more, nor could our hands
resist the iron bark of oaks. Jays scolded

from branch to branch. We forgot how
to breathe. You led me to bushes
where the cat disappeared, and down
past raspberry gates. Evening lowered

itself slowly that midsummer day, spending
light as the hours grew. I could almost
find your skin, glowing in that hot, dark shade.



Mullet Run
Greg Lowman

All-American Bullets

Julianne Carew

I was thirteen years old the first time I ever held a gun. It was out in the Mojave Desert, so far in the middle of nowhere that I could stand with my arms straight out and spin around in a circle and see nothing but dirt and tumbleweeds. It made it so that I never knew when to stop spinning.

My father was the one who first put the gun in my hands. He had just purchased a vacation home out in Calico, on a private ski lake the size of a glorified puddle. My father used to joke that he had worked his whole life to achieve the American Dream, only to be granted a second mortgage. He also used to joke that he bought a gun to protect his family from enemies I couldn't see. I don't know which joke held more truth.

One day my father walked up to me and stopped me mid-spin. "Hey! Stop foolin around. This isn't a toy," he said, holding up the shotgun in his hands.

What I wanted to say was, but weren't we supposed to be on vacation? Wasn't this our vacation house? When was it time to have fun? But all I could manage to do was stand there.

My father grinned, as though we were on the inside of some private joke where I didn't get the punch line. He held out the gun and motioned for me to take it.

"Come on, it'll only hurt you if you let it."

When I didn't so much as move, my father came up behind me and fit his body around mine. He matched my finger up with the trigger and pulled.

The kickback bruised my chest. The sound could be heard back on the dock of our vacation house. My eyes stayed closed.

That year there was blood in the schools of Dover, Tennessee, Red Lake, Minnesota, Chicago, Illinois and La Follette,

Tennessee. There was the blood of a girl who had finally become that of a woman.

When I was seventeen years old I fell in love. Or, I thought I fell in love. I wanted to be in love. And at the time, I thought that was kind of the same thing. I fell in love with a tall, dark, and handsome All-American football player who was captain of our high school team. I was a cheerleader. I was a cheerleader even though I didn't want to be, but my mom wanted me to be a cheerleader and so I was. My mom wanted me to be a cheerleader because she came from a poor family who couldn't afford the fancy ribbons and extra outfits, so now that she was married to an All-American businessman with a vacation home, she thought her daughter should be a cheerleader because that was the next best thing. It was also the year of pretending. I pretended that I was a grown-up, pretended that I was happy. I pretended that I was okay doing things even though I was not.

When I was seventeen my All-American, big-time businessman of a father invited my All-American football playing boyfriend to our American Dream house. By this time, our vacation house felt like more than a dream, it felt like a home. It felt like a sacred space that my father only invited his favorite people to. The fact that he invited my boyfriend to our vacation house made me squeal and twirl and forget that I was pretending to be a woman.

It was the beginning of September. School had just started. My relationship had just started. I spent days picking out the perfect bikini to impress my perfect boyfriend out on my family's perfect dock. But for whatever reason, on the day we arrived in Calico, it was freezing. And even though the house was decorated with brightly colored fish and antique lighthouses, we decided to go shooting. Or, everyone else decided to go shooting and I pretended to be okay with it. I pretended that I was not afraid of anything. I smiled and sighed and wore my bathing suit underneath my clothes. I stared out the window on the way to the sand dunes and told myself that it was love that was making me squeeze my boyfriend's hand and not fear.

Out in the sand dunes, I found a coyote's skull. My boyfriend was laying out the guns on a card table. My father was setting up an ice chest of beer. They called to me from the shadow of the truck, but I couldn't stop staring at the bone that still seemed

to growl. Where was the rest of his body? How did he die? What could kill a coyote out in the desert besides another coyote? His no-eyes seemed so human.

My boyfriend came up beside me. He looked at what I was looking at, but he did not see the same thing. After a while, he took a small gun out of his back pocket and put it in my hands like I'd asked for it, like my participation was expected, like being in the wrong place at the right time meant something.

"It's a ladies revolver," he said. "You know, something you can handle."

Was love supposed to make me feel small? Because it did and so did the gun. It was almost as big as my palm but longer, heavier. The cool metal burned blisters underneath my skin. But when I put my finger on the trigger, I felt powerful, too powerful. Or at least I was able to pretend that I was. What if I dropped it and accidentally shot myself? What if I dropped it and shot someone else? The gun made it seem so easy to destroy a life.

There were targets set up in the distance, but I pretended that I couldn't see them. Instead, without really knowing why, I aimed my shaking hands at the coyote skull and shot it—point blank. It was the first time I ever saw bone shatter.

That year parents lost their children in the schools of Hampton, Virginia, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Larose, Louisiana and San Bruno, California. A girl lost a piece of herself by trying to be a different girl for another.

Three years later, I was a sophomore in college and I was done with pretending. I was away from my parents, away from their semblance of the American Dream; I was away from the boyfriend who would have led me to a version of my own. I was still a girl, but almost a woman. I was living on my own.

I was in my apartment watching some movie on some website when suddenly, all the screens went blank. The lights turned off. The air conditioning buzzed to a halt. It was dusk in San Diego and the entire city was facing a blackout. I went outside at the same time everyone else went outside, all of us at a loss as to what to do when we had no other choice but to look at each other.

People flooded the streets. All the stores closed down. Missionaries knocked on doorsteps claiming that it was the beginning of the end of the world. No one knew how wide or far-

reaching the darkness was. No one's cell phones worked. There were rumors that the blackout was a government conspiracy, that it was the work of terrorists and we were under attack. There were rumors that the Internet had finally collapsed and the whole world was shutting down. No one knew what to believe. We were terrified college students who had found themselves in a news story, and, when faced with what seemed like the end of the world, we drank. We scoured our liquor cabinets and pulled from our secret stashes. We drank whatever we could with whomever was around. We became best friends with our neighbors, played cards by candlelight, and made love that wasn't really love at all, but we pretended it was because we thought it would be our last chance.

The next morning, my father called. I am sure he said everything that he was supposed to say. That he had been so worried about me. That he was so glad that I was okay. That he missed me. But the only thing I remember him saying was, "Your mother and I should have never sent you to school without a gun."

That year there was more blood, in more schools, in cities everywhere. But I didn't know about it because I stopped watching the news.

I spent the rest of college with my senses on high alert. I made sure that all of my classes ended before dark. I counted the blue emergency buttons that littered campus like the dead bodies that piled up on other campuses just like ours. I didn't just walk to the library, I ran. I ran all the way home as soon as I graduated.

There are several reasons why I told people that I was moving home: to save money, to travel, to figure out what came next, but none of these reasons were true. I moved home because it felt safe. It was a place where there were guns that were pointed away from me.

Home with too much time on my hands, I tried to ignore the warnings. I boycotted the news, switched from cable T.V. to Netflix, and kept the radio turned to KIIS FM. But no matter how much I hibernated in my parental cocoon, the world grew more violent. The echoes of misfired bullets resounded beyond my childhood home, beyond my father's lake house. They reverberated onto my Facebook profile, my Twitter feed, and my Tumblr dashboard. Thousands of strangers stood in solidarity to fight hate crimes with more hate.

My father bought a rifle and kept it loaded, the case unzipped underneath his bed. I watched him tuck it against the headboard and rant about the second amendment. I could not have felt less like an American, but I was still glad that the gun was there.

It had been six years since me and my big, American, football-playing boyfriend were together. He was no longer a football player and I was no longer a cheerleader, but we still kept in touch. I knew that he was back in the Inland Empire. I knew that he was a medical sales representative working in San Bernardino. I knew that I still cared for him even though I wouldn't admit it. It turns out that sometimes, love is just too hard to recognize when everyone is pretending, but that doesn't mean it isn't there.

When the news of the San Bernardino shooting broke, my father was the first one to call me. "Hey, I was wondering if you knew if Brian was okay."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

My father cleared his throat. "There was a shooting," he said, "right by Brian's work."

My body went limp as I remembered all the times that Brian had held it. He had been my All-American football-playing boyfriend. He represented all that I knew and all that I wish we could have been. I could not imagine a world without him in it.

I hung up and left work even though it was lunchtime. I dialed Brian's number and then I dialed it again. I dialed until his phone went straight to voicemail, and then I left messages begging him to call me back. I called his sister. I called his mom. Break-ups no longer mattered. No one had heard from him. No one knew where he was. I cried all the way home.

When I got there, I went straight to my parent's room and took the gun out from underneath their bed. It was loaded. I cradled it in my arms as I walked outside.

On my hands and knees, I dug a hole that was long and deep. It was the size of the rifle, but it looked more like a grave. I buried the gun that day. I buried the gun hoping that from the seeds of death, I could find peace.





The Way of Families
Alex Duensing

Pages

By Tom Lin

Nothing is lost until I realize it's lost, because I probably didn't even know it was lost in the first place.

For instance, it took a while until someone asked, "Did you lose it?"

"Excuse me?" I asked, computer speakers blasting with the sound effects of some Hollywood movie. I turned around and frowned at my friend Mick.

"You know? The book that I had last week." He was picking at a couple of books, squinting at the covers as if they were treasures, gold dust to be found in river banks.

"What book?"

"The one with a macchiato on the cover."

"Called *Macchiato*?"

Mick shrugged. He threw the books in his hands like Frisbees with no dog at the other end and lifted more books in his search. "I could have sworn it was around here..." His voice faded into silence as the whispers of books shuffling filled the quiet.

That particular moment was quickly forgotten. I didn't even remember it at all until one day—that one day—when during a failed writing session at our local coffee shop, I heard the song about you.

Well, the song that I almost forgot was about you.

The song about dancing under the blue of the stars.

It was ignored by everyone else in the shop, but in that instant I was enthralled, and for some reason your face came back into my mind. It wasn't much, just your smile and the pink that glittered your lips.

And the green shades in your eyes that fanned like petals

under the sun.

And the cheeks that bunched up like balloons when you got mad.

Or frustrated.

Or just went away.

I headed home and looked for your book. It was the one that you told me to read, but I never did, and it ended up buried somewhere after you left. At first, it made sense that I couldn't find it. It'd been years, and I'd never even thought of the book, so I could imagine it buried by dozens of books.

After an afternoon of sorting, I still couldn't find it. I placed all the books I owned in columns, line after line after line. The floor was bare, and your book was not there. Neither was the macchiato book or any book with any sort of coffee on the cover.

I walked outside for a cigarette and called Mick about your book since he used my book collection as if he owned a membership card.

"What was it about?" he asked after I explained the situation.

"I told you, I don't know. Didn't read it," I said.

"Then how am I supposed to know?"

"I don't know. I was just asking."

"Then stop asking, because I don't know."

I hung up and walked back to my apartment, shifting through the options and possibilities regarding the disappearance of your book.

But when I opened the door to my apartment, there she was.

Someone I had never met before.

She was in her mid-twenties with long black hair, a silky green blouse, and a skirt made of separate flaps her legs peeked through when she moved. She wore no shoes, only toe rings with different colored stones in different shapes.

She looked at me and said, "Huh," followed by a monotone, "I thought you left."

Her eyes looked down to the open book she held and remained there as she went back to reading.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Paige."

"Do I know you?"

"No," she answered. She squinted at the ceiling and twisted her lips. "Wait, maybe. Not sure."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean, maybe you have seen me before. I'm not really sure. You never say hello."

"What?"

"Well, I see you down the hall, but I'm not sure you notice me," she said.

"You live here?"

"Yes."

"You do? Where?"

"Next door," she pointed at the wall with her thumb. "Like, there."

I couldn't say if anybody lived there or not, because truthfully I didn't know any of my neighbors and tried my best to avoid them all.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

She waved at the book as if the answer was obvious.

"I'm here reading a book," she said.

"Why are you in my house? How did you even get in?"

"Your window doesn't lock," she said, pointing at the window. "It just slides right open."

"I'm pretty sure I need to call the cops."

"Why? It's not like I'm doing anything wrong."

"You're in my apartment going through my books."

"You weren't reading them anyway," she said. "They're going to waste if nobody reads them."

"That is my concern and this is my place."

"I'll leave, it's cool," she said and strolled towards the window with the book still in her hand. "Don't want to disturb you or anything."

"What are you doing with my book?" I asked.

"Duh," she scoffed.

"Look, it's my property, you can't just come here and take my books anytime you want."

"What were you going to do with them anyway? Leave them sitting until they rot?" She turned around and stared into my eyes. "So you'd rather these pages remain unread until they're thrown away and forgotten? Do you know how much effort went

into each of the letters chosen for each of these paragraphs? Do you realize how much love and attention was given to every single page before it even got printed onto paper?"

I stared at her. I stared at her hard. The honks and engine noises drifted through the window. "I expect it back when you're done," I said.

"Sounds fair enough." She turned and headed out the window.

I followed and looked out, watching her hop effortlessly from my window to hers.

"Hey!" I called after her.

"What?" she screamed back.

"Do you mind if I come over there and go through my books?" I said. "There's some that I need now."

She poked her head out and looked at me sideways as if she had laid her head on the edge of the windowsill to feel the breeze rush through her hair.

"Come on in," she said.

"I'm not going through your window," I said looking down and feeling vertigo from sudden fear.

"I know." She ducked her head in before I could tell whether she was serious or not.

Her apartment was mostly empty, her furniture consisting of blow up couches and bean bag chairs. The only electronic I could see was a small laptop.

"Do you have blow up plates too?" I asked.

"Haha, funny." She rolled her eyes.

My books were stacked nicely in a corner near the window, and tall enough to reach my chest. I'm six foot one.

"Aren't you afraid that this will fall?" I looked down the column at the titles printed on the spines.

"It hasn't so far," she said.

"And just because it hasn't so far, you don't think it'll ever fall?"

She shrugged and opened the book she took from my apartment.

I found the book Mick wanted, which disappointed me because it wasn't called *Macchiato*, but a different title that didn't match the coffee foaming in the cup on the cover. I read the title

out loud, “*The Adventures of Misconceptions and Missed Opportunities.*”

“Eh, it could have been better,” Paige mumbled from behind what she was reading. “It’s missing character development and a satisfying ending.”

I raised an eyebrow, because I didn’t know anything about Mick’s book since I didn’t read it. To test her further, I picked another book from the center of the column, carefully sliding it out as if it were a brick in a game of Jenga. “*Muscle Tone for the Lonely Hearted,*” I said.

She laughed. “It’s probably the dumbest book I’ve read, ever. There’s no way that a muscled jerk would be that nice to a wallflower girl.”

“Sounds like you read all of them?”

She peeked over the top of the book in her hands. “And you’re surprised?”

I shrugged and went back to perusing book titles.

“Do you have a favorite so far?” I asked.

“You mean like, ever?”

“Well, no. I mean from the books you took out of my apartment.”

“Hmm.” She put the book down and squinted at the stack. “There was one I really liked,” she said, crawling closer to me and the books. Her index finger slid down the titles one by one, until she reached one almost at the bottom with a pink cover and letters in bright yellow.

“Here,” she said and pulled it out as easily as a table cloth in a magic trick. She handed it to me.

The pink cover had a yellow chick peeking out of a half broken shell. *The Art of Letting Chicks Hatch.*

“It’s about this girl who used to be impatient about everything until she accidentally caused the death of her older sister. Then she watches time slow down as depression takes over, but she finds love and life again when she lets things take their time instead of rushing.”

Mesmerized, I only caught half of what Paige said.

The cover was the pink that glittered your lips.

I sat down and stared at the cover. Paige stared at me as the clock ticked. I opened the book and looked inside. The first page was blank white with nothing on it.

Somehow I expected a message from you.

“Did you lose the person who owned this book?” Paige asked.

I looked at her, then at the book again. “I guess.”

“Well? It’s either yes or no.” She sat down in front of me.

“There was this girl I knew who gave me this book, and that’s it,” I said.

“Did you love her?”

I frowned. “Why does it matter?”

She shrugged and watched me flip through the pages. I skipped through words and paragraphs, and when I closed the book I stared at the back cover like a statue stares at its fountain eternal.

“Was that as good as you expected?” Paige asked, picking up the book she was reading.

“I don’t know what I was expecting,” I replied.

“Then why did you want the book in the first place?”

I looked back down to your book again, before lifting my eyes to meet her green eyes. “Because I thought it would trigger memories of someone I loved,” I answered.

“Well, did it?”

“Yeah, yeah it did.”

“Well, that’s good then,” she smiled and buried her face inside her book again.

I waved the book in my hand, a motion on the edge of throwing and holding it tight. I asked, “have you ever wanted to re-read a book again?”

“Sometimes,” she replied. “Sometimes I think about these books I read when I was younger. They were a series of books about this princess tasked with taming nine dragons throughout the world to save her kingdom.”

“Why did you want to re-read them?”

“Well, I remember how involved I was in them and how happy they made me feel.”

“Did you end up re-reading them?”

She shook her head. “Nah.”

“Why not? You said you really liked those books.”

“I did,” Paige said. “But I was young, and now I’m not, and there’s just too many more books that I still need to meet.”

I looked at your book and smiled. “Yeah,” I said. “That’s

how I feel.”

She stared at me.

I threw your book away. It spun in the air and landed on the floor. Paige and I watched for a few seconds until it stopped moving.”

“Alright,” she said. “Now what?”

“Now, I’m going to take this book with the macchiato cover and give it to my friend Mick.” I got up.

“Okay,” she said, and continued reading the book in her hand.

When I reached the front door, I turned back. “You hungry?”

She glanced up from the pages. “What?”

“Do you want to go out and eat something?”

She looked at me as if I was quizzing her with a riddle.

I walked to her and took the book away.

“Hey! I was reading that!”

“I know,” I said. “I figured you’d appreciate a rest and to read a new story.”

She stared at me with a frown and maybe a scowl.

We walked towards the closest café and talked about the things we didn’t want to be.



Author & Artist Bios

Cyn Bermudez is a mixed-race American writer and astronomy nerd. You can find her short fiction published or forthcoming in the anthologies *Building Red* and *The Best of Vine Leaves Literary Journal*. Her work can also be found in small lit magazines such as *Fiction Vortex*, *The Red Line*, *The Milo Review*, and more. For more information, please visit her website at www.cynbermudez.com.

Julianne Carew writes new adult and literary fiction. She is currently trying to find a home for her first novel, *Why Paintings Fall*. She lives in the Los Angeles area but travels all over the world collecting stories.

Alex Duensing. Graduate of William Paterson and Columbia? Yes. Ran for St. Petersburg, FL City Council? Yes. Won? No. Stopped Mayan Apocalypse on rooftop with performance art? Yup. Strange but nice fellow? Clearly. Able to create mechanical engines that run completely on the energy a person creates while appreciating a painting? Not Yet.

Cheryl H. Kinderknecht is a mixed media artist and former gallery owner who also happens to have retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative vision condition. Her work has been on exhibit and sold on Florida's Gulf Coast and Key West and is in private collections in the United States and abroad.

Steve Klepetar's work has received several nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. His latest collections include *Speaking to the Field Mice* (Sweatshoppe Publications), *Blue Season* (with Joseph Lisowski, mgv2>publishing), *My Son Writes a Report on the Warsaw Ghetto* (Flutter Press), and *Return of the Bride of Frankenstein* (Kind of a Hurricane Press).

Florida native **Greg Lowman's** artwork features marine life, the outdoors, and wildlife in various media. Find him at www.GregLowmanArt.com and on Instagram @greglowman.

Tom Lin is a writer in Columbus, Ohio. He's the co-founder of Inkstone Creative Writing Workshop. He's currently studying creative writing at Ohio State University and pursuing a master's degree in English Education. His stories are published in *Longridge Review*, *Pilcrow & Dagger* and *Dali's Love Child*.

Jorge Luis Mendoza is a self-taught artist and illustrator born in Santa Clara, Cuba and based in Bradenton, FL. He graduated with a degree in Architecture from the Central University Marta Abreu de Las Villas. He works with various Cuban publishing houses as a book illustrator and specializes in youth and children short stories, poetry books, magazines covers, and more. His first creations reflected a geometric and abstract composition. Later, passing through several stages, his work reached a point where it touches his own personal worlds: islands, birds, journeys, nostalgia, and love. He has also ventured into the world of animation and the creation of experimental audiovisual. He has participated in various group exhibitions and six solo exhibitions.

Yanuary Navarro was born in a tiny village cradled by a valley in Honduras. She studied illustration at the Ringling College of Art and Design, in Sarasota, Florida. Her personal illustrations depict

narratives from a series of invented short stories titled “The World of Wolli.” The narratives reference botany, earth and space science, Science Fiction, fairy tales, childhood and Latin American culture. Her work serves as a personal reminder that she is a tiny dot in the context of our universe. At the same time, all tiny dots have a purpose, as Dr. Seuss said it best, “No matter how small.” As a result, she is constantly asking herself, “How can I best use my time here?”

Courtney Prather is an Emerson MFA alumnus and proud member of Pug Squad. She lives in Boston and enjoys playing her keyboard at all hours. Her work has appeared in *Digital Americana* and *Entropy Magazine*.

Allison Sobczak is a graduate of Columbia College Chicago where she earned a BA in Creative Writing. As a student, she received several scholarships and had her work published in the 2012 issue of the *Story Week Reader*. Her home is a small suburban town outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but she fell in love with the Windy City when she first moved here five years ago. Her passions include writing, reading, animals, and heavy metal music. You can usually find her in Starbucks enjoying a chai tea latte.

Hannah Warren is currently an undergraduate English major at Mississippi State University. Upon graduation, she wishes to pursue a Master in Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing; she is published in *Nota Bene*.

M. Drew Williams is a poet from Western New York. His poetry has appeared in various publications. His chapbook, *No Ghost Goes Unnoticed*, was recently released by Leaf Garden Press. He will begin his MFA candidacy at Creighton University this coming Fall.



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