

Elektraphrog

A photograph of a white feather floating on a body of water, surrounded by tall, thin reeds. The water is calm, reflecting the reeds and the feather. The background is slightly blurred, showing more reeds and a hint of a green field.

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Cover Image:
“Mirror Image”
By Tania Slobodyan

Back Cover Image:
Detail from Mirror Image
By Tania Slobodyan

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Sestina: Living My Life

By Gabriella Garcia

All my life I've been worried about the right time,
When to talk, when to listen, when to cry.
You've made me feel like my feelings aren't mine,
And believe me, I'm trying, trying to answer the phone
that's ringing,
But I can't do that, I'm still trying to memorize my lines.
My only outlet is to write.

I do it till my fingers cramp up and my pen runs out of ink,
I write
because it stops me from worrying about the perfect time.
When I write I'm not worried about my lines.
I build worlds out of words and sometimes it stops the
crying,
what never stops is the ringing
of the telephone on my nightstand. Sorry, yours, not mine.

I'm always reminded that everything I have is yours, not
mine.
You raised me, fed me, clothed me. But I still write
to let out the shit you put in my head, it never stops
ringing.
You've always told me to pace myself, but how can I pace
myself if I'm running out of time?
I never get to breathe, if I stray too far you pull me back.
So what is there to do but cry?
But one thing I'll never forget is when I started drawing
lines.

Not on paper, but on my pale skin. Long scarlet lines
that weren't all your fault, some blame was mine.
But I'll remind you that you were the one who ignored my
crying.
those finger cramps weren't enough anymore, I put down
my pen, writing

just wasn't enough anymore, and time
was something I was about to end, right along with the
ringing.
It was always there, but not for what I needed it to be, the
ringing.
it was always to remind me of some job, or assignment, so
the lines
fell over each other over time.
it was a funny thing really, it went on for a while. They
were mine.
My secret to keep, my story to tell. But I had stopped
writing.
I stopped a lot of things, even crying.

Something made me start again, the crying,
I'm not sure what. But I'm thankful every day for that
phone ringing
now because I think that's what it was. I started writing
and cut it out with the lines,
pun intended, yes, but it's okay to joke because they were
mine.
And now, I'm not so much worried about the time.

I still cry, and I still write, but now
I'm not so much worried about the
time, because I realized my life is not yours, it's mine.



Youth

By Samantha Kunkle

The taste of youth was all we ever had, it seeped into our tastebuds, it was broken rubber soles on our shoes from playing on the pavement, it was the dirt on our clothes and the sweat on my face and it rang in our laughter. It tasted so good, like the home cooked meals from our parents surrounded by family and it followed by dessert, it was so sweet and it was something to be basked in for now one realizes it was ephemeral, but as a child, it is something you hardly every think about. When there was that breaking point, the tastebuds turned a bit sour, soles broken in from working too much, the sweat became more unbearable and the laughter died down, the pile of work building up like the sandcastles we used to make at the beach, the pavement leading to a bridge, with the final taste of youth swallowed, something that, if one is lucky, can be savored in only rarely. Depression, along with the feeling of loneliness, had began to seep into our souls, bathing it in darkness alongside my mind. The rapid change that needed to be quickly adjusted to was something that we weren't prepared for but the change was just growing up, becoming more aware of things, there was no excuse to be blissfully ignorant anymore. We had only desired to live in the past, it itches unbearably at our minds and it aches uncontrollably in our hearts, the amount of times we just want to go back.

We often lived in the past, you and I. There was a fear in our hearts and a fire burning in our heads as we crossed the bridge from childhood to adulthood, that fire consumed us and burned that bridge to leave us stranded. So driven with fear that instead of making use of the present to push to the future, we end up wishing and talking about how we wish we could rather just cross over the bridge once more and live as we used to live before. We knew each other for a total of 7 years, for so long, that I have never been so close to

somebody like I have been with you, not even my own family.

■ ■ ■

I remember that night, Maria, a week before Christmas, that your cousin had passed, your only caregiver, it was so unexpected. It was so off, that entire day, but that feeling was not foreign to me at the time. I remember getting the news from work during the day and picking you up at your friend's house, the night plays in my head and I can remember it vividly, it was dark and the warmth of the car's air conditioning contrasted that of the cold and chilly night, but you weren't even phased too much to put on a jacket to keep you warm. I had brought you some pizza leftover from wherever my parents and I had eaten. I remember how you got in and it was quiet. I drove us to the nearest park and we sat there for god knows how long; the moon providing us our only source of light and the car radio softly giving out songs. You smoked and smoked and I said nothing to it, we were each fighting our own demons, yours which were of you wanting to get out of living in the past, the season and your feelings had made you feeling more depressed than usual that now, you had lost yourself and who you were as well as your cousin, you were without any constant to make you feel stable but that wasn't something you weren't going to burden me with at the time, something only to keep in your head.

"Can I tell you about how it happened?" you asked me, the tone of your voice more colder than the air that surrounded us, and it had sent chills down my spine, I couldn't have anticipated it. When you asked me that question I contemplated for a moment, wondering if you really wanted to live through it again twice in a day, but I had felt it would come across as rude that I had said:

"If you want..."

So you did, you told me everything. The text messages, the calls, the feelings, the hospital, you told me how it all happened and I listened deeply, to feel your words touch the

base of my ears and down to my heart. I saw the tears line your eyes but I did not see any fall and I, selfishly, thought to myself how I could feel that, the desperation to want to cry but to also want to hold it back, and the painful feeling it brought to the heart.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Maria.”

Really, that was all that I could say to you that day because to offer condolences is not my forte, an awkward person by nature that it’s difficult for me to consult with another dealing with a tragedy. After sitting in the dark outside the car, listening to the bristling of the trees and the sounds coming from insects around us, I decided to drive us somewhere else. I drove us to the place in which we worked. There, it was somber at first but they always knew how to make us feel better, surrounded by the laughter of our coworkers, sitting all of us alone in the dining room talking amongst each other and laughing had us forgetting for a bit. In the dining room that room, the atmosphere wasn’t heavy, bringing a temporary bliss to real life, far from the stressful days that occur in the same restaurant.



The following week, on the night of Christmas Eve, I also remember your text message that you had walked out, disrespected by the manager, but you had no car that you were just sitting outside alone in the dark. I rolled my eyes at your message but decided anyways that I would come to pick you up. The air now even more cold than the previous week but instead this time you were wearing a jacket. I can recall that night vividly, pulling into the parking lot of the place, empty and already closed down an hour prior for the employees to go home early to be with their families on the night before Christmas. The moment you entered the car we were already laughing because I too had done the same thing,

“I can’t believe you actually did that,” I scoffed in between the laughter, “now you’re not allowed to make jokes about me doing it anymore.”

“You won’t even believe it, he had called me an idiot for not closing the freezer door!” Maria yelled out,

“Well, was he wrong?” I joked.

■ ■ ■

I decided to take us to a restaurant that was actually open that night, the low lighting and the sound of Christmas music mixed with a bit of static echoing from the restaurant had provided us a warm atmosphere. The food was mediocre at best but we weren’t exactly there to eat, only to get away from the reality that we lived in for a bit and to talk amongst ourselves. You took a sip of the coffee, the one you had remarked was bitter earlier and I picked at the food.

“So, how are you feeling now?” It was a question that has been lingering on my mind, I was too afraid to say it aloud, but it had been eating away that I figured it wouldn’t have hurt to ask her.

“I’m feeling alright. I haven’t been home yet because I’m too afraid to go back, to feel alone.” you said back, quietly.

“Well, you have to go back there sometime, your things are there and you can’t keep living with your friend and their family forever.”

“I know.”

“If you feel up to it, we can go back there tonight, I’ll accompany you, you’ll have me there, and always.” The idea almost seemed implausible but I had to ask anyway.

The food had gone cold now, and the waitress had handed us our check, the kitchen already breaking down and everybody seemingly ready to head home for the night as well.

“Okay, we can head back tonight.”

■ ■ ■

So, I did take us to your house, only a 10 minute drive away. When we had arrived there, the entire neighborhood

was dark, and we just sat there for some time, reeling in the silence. There was nothing to be said but I can tell that both of our minds were running hundreds of miles per second, deciding on what we should do next. Though, I was the one to ask to bring you here, I had begun to second guess whether or not that was the best decision to do so early, but we both knew that it had to be done sooner or later.

After 8 minutes had passed, I spoke up,

“Do you really want to do this?”

You were silent for a minute, eyes seemed distant before you replied back to me,

“Yes.”

The night air had gotten far colder than earlier, the sounds of the car doors closing reverberated in the neighborhood as the only sound. When we had entered the house, it was messy. Your cousin was one to keep a hold of many things that she found precious and memorable so the house was far from being bare, instead decorated with picture frames, knickknacks from old friends and clothing. The first part of the house was the living room, again, there was silence between us as we stood there.

“I’m only going to collect my clothes, wait here for a minute.” Maria spoke, almost a mutter actually and I nodded to her in reply.

There were picture frames with smiling people and cups laying around on the tables; the inside of the house, I had realized, was almost as cold as the outside and I pulled my jacket closer to me, trying to relish in the warmth it only little provided me. After a bit, you had returned with a backpack in your hand, motioning me to go. I didn’t say anything else, though we had been friends for so long, I didn’t want to overstep the boundary, so we left. She collected only clothes and nothing else, and I didn’t say anything else.

“Where do you want to go, Maria? Do you want me to drive you back to your friends?”

“Yeah.”

■ ■ ■

On the way back, there was only light conversation, talk of plans for tomorrow and if we wanted to see each other then, the sounds of the radio announcer wishing us a merry Christmas and the sound of the car. The air felt a bit more light, though I was unsure of what it was. Though, when we arrived to the house, Maria had spoken.

“Can I tell you something, now?” you asked me, the look in your eyes seemed a bit distant still but also sincere, the car radio was tuned low and the screen of my phone turning on with a message from my parents and the time reading 11:37pm.

“Of course.” I replied.

“Thank you.”

“For?”

“For being here with me of course and being there with me always.”

On some days there lies a hope in my soul where I don't hold it for myself, on days where loneliness hits the hardest, that the day will pass and I will live. Maria and I lived and in this one experience in our 7 year span, there was that sudden realization, like when one realizes that they are breathing and they exist amongst billions on the planet, that we really had each other. Surely, everything won't work out immediately but it *will* be alright, for now we bask in the moment of that of a light feeling, that we were alright, that we had each other and that we weren't alone.



Shaken by Fire

By Daibelis Almonte

I looked out the window and all I could see was Fire.
The only thing I felt was Shaken.
All of the ideas I had Broke,
In that instant all that mattered was Life.
Everything changed in that Moment,
We might have made it if we stayed Together.

Thinking back we were always together.
One of my favorite times was
sitting around the fire,
Telling stories that would leave us all shaken.
That night my phone broke,
But still all that mattered was life,
Not the shattered screen at that moment.

Going back to the moment,
When we should have stayed together,
Right when I noticed the fire,
Our world was shaken.
The peace we felt broke,
It flashed before my eyes, my life.

A fantastic life,
I lived every moment,
Always kept it together,
Followed what lit me, my fire.
Always firm, never shaken,
Until that moment when everything broke.

My breath broke,
I saw the end of a life.
I will never forget that moment,
When I didn't keep it together,
And it was put out, her fire.
All that was left was me, shaken.



Mirror Image

By Tania Slobodyan



Actions and Their Consequences

By Kelly Boucher

The entire group stood in a crooked circle as they extended their arms out to hold hands. There was a slight pause between many of them, as they hesitated to grasp each other's sweaty palms. There was something about hearing about the disturbing things they had done while in the depths of their addictions that set Carly off from any form of physical touch. In unison they said "God, Grant us the serenity, to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Carly just stood there as they recited the prayer. They did this at every AA meeting she attended, but she did not participate. She appeared at the meetings twice a week, only because she had been court ordered to. She did not believe in AA or sponsors or any form of a higher power.

As she slinked out of the group room, she felt pressure on her left bony shoulder. An old woman who she had recognized as Ella, embraced her in a hug that seemed to say that everything was going to be okay. Carly stood there, allowing the woman to hold her in her arms, yet she had not embraced her back.

"I'm so glad you made it today sweetie." Ella said gently.

"As if I had a choice" Carly said rolling her eyes.

"I know, I wish you would attend even if you weren't mandated..." Ella said as she glanced at Carly genuinely.

"I'll get there, Okay?" Carly said as she looked at Ella so deep into her eyes that she can see her own reflection. "I just need a little more time."

Ella tried to explain to Carly that if she doesn't start that day, she wouldn't start at all. Carly is not phased. Ella gave up, as she turned to a group of people, ignoring Carly's remark. Carly noticed that Ella was trying to help, but She didn't need help. She hated how Ella spoke to her. She acted as if she is doing charity work, instead of truly wanting to

work with her. Not to mention, she treated every person in the group the same.

When Carly finally got home, she almost immediately poured a large glass of wine. She lived alone in downtown Cleveland. She had a roommate, yet her aggressive behavior when she drank drove her away. Carly knew she had an issue but had no intention of changing her drinking patterns. She often thought of herself as the exception, the one that would not drink herself to her death, or into a psychotic episode. Yet, with the path she was headed down, she was plunging headfirst into both of these situations.

Carly's therapist had told her to journal her thoughts every night, so, she sat down with her now fifth refill of chardonnay. She wrote "I do not need AA. I do not need anything but alcohol. No part of me feels I need to change, therefore I will not. I want to be the first addict to live a happy normal life, without being sober." She wholeheartedly believed this, though there were a few obstacles in her way. First, her court mandate to go to AA and participate. Second, her parents who recently told her that they would cut her off if she did not get sober or at the very least show some effort. Third, goddamn Ella, who would not leave her alone.



The next day Carly woke up to a phone call from her mother.

"What's up?" Carly says through a pounding hangover headache that was much too familiar.

Her mother asked if she is up for breakfast. Carly contemplated lying in bed for hours instead of nourishing her body. Although, she was not one to turn down golden buttered pancakes, or bacon that is on the brink of burnt and crispy. She agreed as the thought of these foods made her mouth water. As her mother approached the house, Carly got an uneasy feeling, yet ignored it. She took two

sour shots of vodka, that burnt as they slithered down her throat, and headed out the door. Her mother was soundless in the car, she looked worried. Carly was well aware that she was the sole purpose of her mother's stress, but the shots of vodka on an empty stomach is enough to tell her that it doesn't matter.

The drive seemed to be further than expected. Carly looked out the window and noticed they were on the highway. She peered behind her mother and saw a suitcase.

"Mom..." Carly said without blinking.

Her mother kept her eyes glued on the road, ignoring her daughter.

"Where are you taking me?" Carly said, screaming. Her mother continued her coldshoulder silence, as a tear rolled down her cheek.

They pulled into a gravel driveway. Carly saw a large wooden sign that read "Happier Days Treatment Center." At that time, no one was speaking. Carly knew what she is in for and understood that there was no use in fighting it. They slowly approached the front door, and an employee let them in. The silence in the waiting room was almost painful. It is so quiet that the air seemed to be making a faint ringing noise. Carly just stared at her mother.

"You know these places don't work right." She said angrily.

"They do too, your grandfather went here and he has been sober since." Her mother explained.

"I don't need this." Carly said.

"You do. You can't expect to live like this for the rest of your life Carly. Addicts cannot be cured while still engaging in the behaviors that got them sick." Her mother said, sternly.

All of the sudden, Carly's "there's no use in fighting it" attitude vanished as she rushed for the door. Just then, the employee came into the room to tell Carly her room was ready. She looked at her mother, who was quietly weeping. Carly just glared at her, and slowly followed the employee out.

After a day of group therapy and doctor's appointments, Carly finally understood that she has lost. She cannot get what she wants, which is to be a functioning alcoholic. After listening to the therapists talk, she realized that her mother was right, and she cannot go on like this.

Although Carly has finally made the decision that she needed to actively work towards sobriety, that did not make it any easier. She woke up the next morning expecting her shots of vodka, but instead was greeted by a nurse giving her medication and luke-warm water. As the days went on, Carly begun detoxing hard. She was experiencing mood swings, fevers and loss of feeling in her legs. She did not want to leave her room.

Later, a nurse entered, and told Carly that she had a phone call. She angrily emerged out of her dark room, stumbling into the wall. Her winged eyeliner was faded down to her chin and her hair was pressed flat against her cheek. On the other end of the phone Carly heard her best friend's voice.

"Oh shit she's alive" Tim said sarcastically.

Carly spent close to an hour on this phone call. Tim was Carly's closest friend, and her drinking buddy. She was well aware that Tim had some alcoholic tendencies of his own, and she envied him for the fact that he was not in treatment. Deviously, they planned a way to sneak alcohol into the center during an outing to Walmart.

When the day for the Walmart trip finally came, Carly had never felt so alive. She was finally getting her alcohol. Their plan included putting the alcohol in a freezer bag and hiding it on a shelf. Carly would then put the bag in her top to sneak it into the facility. When the group arrived at Walmart, they were allowed to disperse and get bare necessities only. Carly made her way to the toy isle, where they had planned the deed. She noticed the end of a freezer bag peeking out from under a barbie doll box. When no one was looking she put the bag in her top. The feeling of the magical liquid was enough to get

Carly's addict brain rapidly triggered. She told the chaperone she had to use the bathroom. She made her way into the stall, intending on having one sip of the poison. As she ripped the bag open, the sharp smell of hard liquor filled the stall. After the first bitter gulp of the pungent liquid, it was as if she was in a daze. She lost all sense of time and her want for recovery. Carly ended up drinking the entire large freezer bag full of vodka.



Carly sat in the stall for an utmost of twenty minutes, as she let herself to feel the alcohol mutate her brain and body. After glorifying this feeling, she begun to worry. They breathalyzed all the patients before reentering the facility. Carly could not get kicked out, this treatment meant so much to her mother. She stumbled out of the stall, forgetting how to walk as the alcohol continued to take over her brain. She made her way outside, escaping the entire group. At this point in time, Carly had been very intoxicated. She plopped down on the cold gravel parking lot floor next to a vehicle she felt she recognized. It was Tim.

"Yo I knew this was going to happen" Tim said, laughing uncontrollably. "I knew your ass was going to get drunk right away, that's why I stayed"

Carly looked Tim, she saw double, and loved it.

"Dude I drank the entire thing!" Carly said, proudly.

The two toxic best friends spent so much time priding each other on their alcohol use that Carly did not even see the bus for the treatment center drive out of the parking lot. Tim ended up convincing Carly to hop in his car so they could go for a drive. They took the highway, blasting music so loud that the base made the back of Tim's car shake.

"Let me drive!" Carly said.

"Nah little girl you're drunk as shit" Tim said, laughing.

"Come on I'm fine, I won't be allowed to drive the entire time I'm in treatment" Carly said.

Tim gave into Carly's begging, as part of him felt bad that she was in treatment. He pulled over and they switched positions. Immediately, Carly floored the gas pedal, swerving from lane to lane. They were both smiling, screaming as if they were on a roller coaster.

Up ahead there was an abandoned truck on the road. Intoxicated Carly had been speeding so fast, that she was unaware of this hazard. The car was flying at 120 miles per hour, as it crashed into the large truck. It was air born for a painfully long three seconds then brutally landed on the passenger's side, crushing Tim's body. Glass was everywhere. All Carly saw was the air bag deploy.



There was a faint beeping sound, as Carly slowly opened her eyes and realized she was in a hospital. Her arm was in a tight brace and her back in a large cast. Her mother busted into the room. She hugged and kissed her, telling her she was so glad she was okay. After the sappy stuff was over, her mother became enraged. Scolding Carly on her alcohol use and driving under the influence. Carly stared blankly, as if she didn't remember any of what her mother was explaining. All she remembered was being with Tim.

"Where is Tim" Carly said, cutting her mother off.

"They didn't tell you? Your drunk ass killed him in the car crash." Her mother said in an accusatory tone.

Just then Carly noticed all of the police officers waiting outside her room. A lawyer entered her room, handing her a packet of papers. He explained that she was being arrested for DUI manslaughter. The police entered and seized Carly, with her mother watching skeptically from the corner of the room. It all had happened so fast, Carly hardly had time to cry.

Before going into the jail for processing, she was taken to see a woman she recognized from the treatment center. It was one of the nurses.

“Tough break” The nurse said. Carly just stared, the life drained from her eyes. The nurse continued talking to Carly about her disease. How the main goal of alcoholism is destruction. The nurse did something that no one has done when trying to get through to Carly. She used the science behind an addict’s brain, which was something that Carly understood. She finally realized that she was in control of her own actions, and that life was something that should be cherished. She learned the hard way that her actions had consequences, and that if she hadn’t drunk that day at Walmart, Tim would be alive.

Carly spent the next few years trying to clean up her act. She got out on house arrest and moved in with her mother. She spent her days attending and participating in AA meetings, as well as doing community service. She wrote letters to Tim’s family every day, as well as journaled about how she was changing her ways.



Don't Go Breaking My Heart

By LeAnna Cruz

I remember falling asleep that night, Adam dressed in his best suit, putting his favorite Rolex on. Dressed to the nine at ten o'clock at night, he must be seeing someone else, I thought to myself. He leaned over, kissing the marks he had left on my face. I struggled to keep my eyes open, I wanted to ask where he was going but there was no fighting it, my medication was kicking in.

I woke up chained to Adam that next morning. In an abandoned building, I could only hear a train going by. I overheard some men in the next room talking about a business agreement. A portion of the conversation was in a language I had never heard before, but I was able to understand someone say two hundred thousand in English. They were dressed too classy in expensive suits to be drug dealers, so what was this about? Had Adam lost a case and made someone angry? Why would they single me and my husband out of everyone in the world? Two large men came in questioning me about money. I told them I knew nothing about money and Adam handled our finances. They sprayed Adam with water, waking him up. They began to argue with him telling him they wanted their money, or they wanted our hearts as payment.

Without skipping a beat, almost as if it was rehearsed, Adam tells them she has a bad heart anyways, so why not take hers.

"We can't get anything out of a bad heart. We had a business arrangement, and you didn't hold up your end." They tell Adam.

"You were supposed to have that heart months ago, that puts us out two hundred thousand dollars!" one of the men yells.

"I told your boss I'd have it when he pays me for the first heart I gave him." Adam tells the men.

“The deal was two human hearts at one hundred thousand each, that is how much the man has offered and you did not deliver.” The man says.

That was the last thing I heard before they knocked me out again. When I woke up, I was still chained to Adam, but I was alone. He didn’t make a noise and didn’t budge when I kicked him. I knocked the chair I was chained to backwards and broke it. I managed to scoot up and over the chair, releasing myself. I crawled to Adam and found him with a hole where his heart used to be. I have envisioned seeing Adam dead many times, each time he is lying lifeless but still calling me names. He may be dead and heartless now, but he’s been dead and heartless for a long time. What a bittersweet moment this is, seeing him get the shit-end of the stick. He has known for ages that I am sick, that I have a bad heart. I think he has tried fighting with me just to get my heart to stop and collect the life insurance. He kicked me down a flight of stairs last month, my heart skipped a few beats and I thought, “this is it; this is when he wins.” In the end he didn’t win, I won. He is dead and I am standing here overlooking his corpse.

I searched him, finding no keys, but his phone was across the room on the ground.

“Damn, its dead.” I yelled.

I left the building, searching for any clue as to where I am. The only thing near me is a train track and a dirty homeless man whistling at me. I walked past him, beaten bloody with no shoes on. At least the homeless man has shoes on, I thought to myself. I am able to accept I have a bad heart now, thinking about how my bad heart was the only thing that saved my life tonight, and it will probably be the thing that takes my life, one day.



Chapel in the Trees

By Priscilla Kuhar



Senior Class of Covid-19

By Madelyn Hesse

Here I sat, behind my MacBook Air.

In my bedroom,

In complete isolation,

Instead of being seen

by my twelfth-grade teachers.

And all of my classmates were in the same situation as me.

Let me explain:

No cherishable memories,

No homecoming,

No Senior Prom,

No Sports Events,

And not eating lunch with your closest friends.

Now's a time to be grateful for technology and the newest
apps.

There is a learning curve to use with the app called zoom.

Staying in contact with your teachers

Receiving emails that give directions on upcoming
assignments or

on how to enter the room for zoom.

We have found new ways as classmates,
to stay connected.

If you go outside, you will witness that

Lysol spray has become perfume,

Hand sanitizer has become lotion, and

Face masks have become the new fashion trend.

I was looking at the school's homepage to see when
graduation will be
alarmed and upset.

While realizing,
That the class of 2020 has become the senior class of Covid-
19

And the first class that may never walk the stage.
Something my friends and I have always dreamed about.

But I believe,
As classmates, we will get through this together.
We will all get through this virus that has made history for
every senior.



Please Return to Sender

By Laura Paquette

Meet me at the café at the train station. You remember it; it's the one with the shiny checkerboard floor and fresh squeezed orange juice. The one where you can sit and watch the trains come and go and laugh at the people who get there too late.

I'll be there at 7am, in the red polka dress and a new pair of patent leather heels. Do you remember the last time you saw me in that dress? Maybe you don't. I mean, I wasn't really wearing it for that long anyway. I'll buy us a magazine so you can do the crosswords and practice your English. I'll get us churros too and some extra napkins because I don't want the chocolate sauce to stain my dress. Then, I'll buy a postcard for Mother and Father, telling them that I'm sorry but I hope they understand. I won't send one to Stewart. I'll just leave him the ring.

You should bring some long pants and sweaters and overcoats. It will be very cold there, and I don't want you to freeze. I can see you laughing now; you can't imagine a world where snow really falls. I'll never forget how hard you laughed when I told you that in January I wear long underwear and thick tights. I remember how we laid there on the hot sand, me rubbing on sunscreen every hour on the dot. You thought it was funny, how I checked my little gold watch and made sure to reapply everywhere, even the tip of my nose. Your skin never turned red, it just kept its perfect bronze hue no matter how long we spent outside.

I still recall the heat that day. That was the day I wore the red and white polka dot dress. Now you remember. It tied at the nape of my neck and I was sweating even though my hair was pulled up. I think it was the hottest day of the summer. Everyone was having their siesta and all we heard the whole afternoon was the whir of electric fans and dogs panting in the street. I remember how quietly I left the apartment that day, barely opening the door so that I could slip out unnoticed and not disturb Señora Cantero's cat.

It was so hot that day. I drank three whole bottles of water before I left, then refilled the bottle so no one would notice. I remember I was mad because I had to reapply my lipstick afterwards.

I remember how the streets were so empty that it felt like night. You know, how even a shadow can creep up and frighten you? I remember when I crossed the bridge over the river and knew that when I returned, I would never be the same. I remember the wobbly tile that I always stepped on for good luck when I went to your father's shop. That day, I stepped on it so much that it broke.

I remember my soft knock and the cool dark air of the shop. I remember how you opened the door and all that I smelled was you and ripe oranges. I remember how you took me by the hand and led me to the back room with the little couch.

I remember how your hands shook as you untied the halter top of the dress. I remember how I pulled off your white work shirt that was stained from all the oranges. There was a bumper crop that year, I think. I remember counting each button that you undid, holding my breath. I remember my hands on your waist, slowly sliding the black pants you always wore down. I remember the way you kissed me, how your lips melted away the heat of the afternoon until our own fire rivaled that of the sun.

I remember other things, of course.

Meet me there, at 7am on January 1st of 1956, so I can finally stop remembering.



Death's Appeal

By Elexis Lamparello

I met Death once.

She was beautiful.

Her hair was honey colored as though the sun
Had taken the time to spare a few drops of its own life
So that it might glow like fine threads of
Gold.

Her eyes were blue like an ocean
Of endless possibilities
Swimming with boundless stories and memories and
Mysteries.

Her skin seemed so soft as if the clouds
Had knitted her from silk and romance novels
And all that which seemed so
Fragile.

She held herself in a manner that was delicate
As though she were dancing with every stride
And singing with every breath. I was left
Entranced.

She hadn't demanded I join her as she offered me her
hand,
Which I wanted so desperately to take,
And only smiled when I politely declined.

She was beautiful.

Even as her white and angelic sleeves which reminded me
of wings
Slipped and exposed
The same scars etching themselves into her own
Perfection.

And though she had everything to offer me,
I was not ready for her yet,
But one day she would be back and we would smile the
 same
Smile.

I met Death once and I fell in love with her,
But I was not ready to be so in love,
And so, when my time has come,
I will meet and fall in love with her all over
Again.

Until then,
Someone told me that you met Death once?
You say you fell in love with Death in a crowded
Room.

So, you say you met Death once?

And he was handsome.
His voice was a symphony
Which played the sweetest of sonnets
Comprised of lyrics meant only for
You.

His embrace was unbelievably soothing like
The lull of sleep and warmth
Of the softest of beds which you wished nothing more to
 rest in for
Eternity.

His smile was entrancing in a way which might make your
 insides
Flip within themselves as if they harbored a million
Little butterflies fluttering just fast enough to make you
Melt.

He entered the room and no one could deny his

Presence. Even among the dozens of people there,
You say you saw only
Him.

And when he offered you his hand
You wanted nothing more to than to take it,
But politely declined.

He was handsome.
Even as he came closer to assure you your decision was
Understandable, and you noticed the same bags beneath
his eyes
And the same, purple-beaten skin clinging to his bones,
you felt only
Adoration.

And though he had everything to offer you,
You weren't quite ready for him yet,
But one day he would be back and you two would embrace
that same
Embrace.

But you were not ready to be so in love,
And so, you say that when your time has come,
You will meet and fall in love with him all over
Again.

Until then,
We will see Death in passing.

Because Death can be found.

In the preciousness of life,
In the love limited to bated breath,
And in heartbeats which begin to beat ever so much more
Slowly.

In the idea that days are not promised

Nor given
And nothing should be taken for
Granted.

In the flowers
Settling in a small vase, watered daily
By tears of longing and affection atop a
Grave.

Death can be found loving those whom
They guide
On their journey towards the heavens.

Death can be found finding lost souls just like you and I,
Offering you and I a hand
Whilst wishing that we won't want to take it. Most
Do.

We met Death once and we fell in love.
We met Death once.



Takeout

By Laura Paquette

I came home tonight
from a day at the office
that made me want to
write “kick me” on an
extra-sticky post it note
and tape it to my boss’ back
and the only thing that got
me out of my car that sighs
even more than I do and cries
more too, because I still
haven’t gotten that leak fixed
was the thought of happy little
dumplings snuggled in their box
and kung pao chicken so hot
it burns everything until my mind
is black and empty.

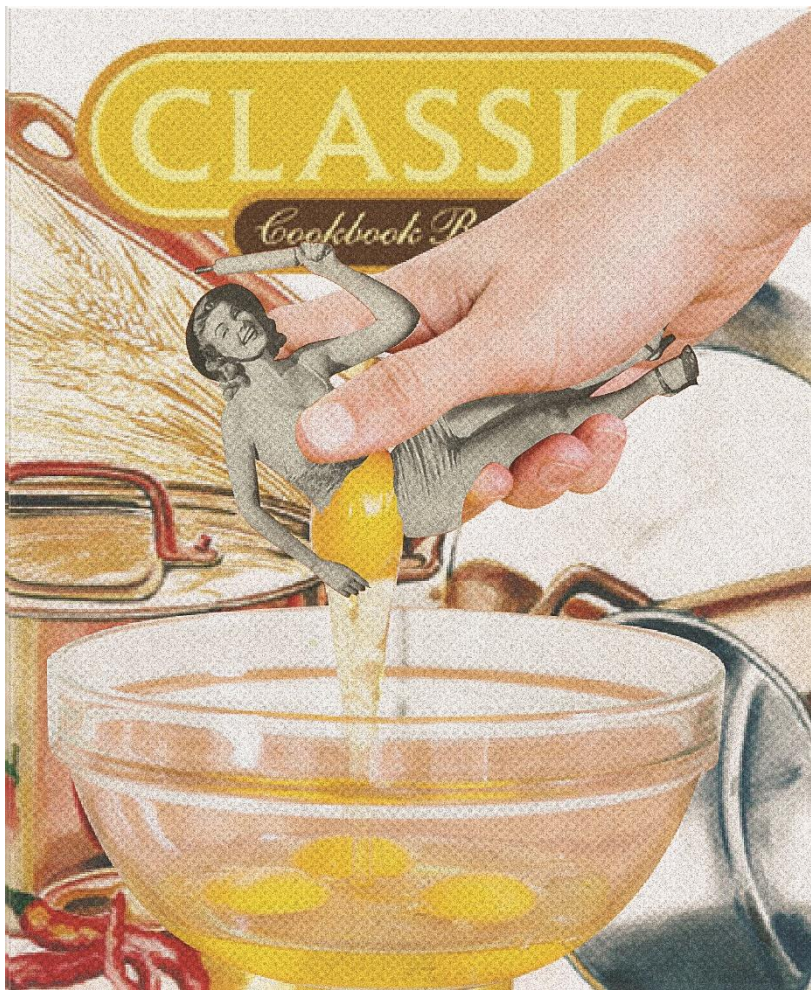
But there was no steaming bag
of food waiting for me on my
“Get Out!” doormat that I bought
as a joke but when I think about
last night doesn’t even make me
crack a smile. And then I saw
old Mrs. Johnson standing with
my food in her hands that shook
as she looked at Andrew Jackson
the way I looked at you last night,
knowing you were destined to leave me.

And I ran across the street and shoved
some bills into the delivery guy’s grubby
hands and told Mrs. Johnson that she could
keep the dumplings with their doughy dimples

and the spicy kung pao chicken and even the chopsticks because all I wanted was the plastic-wrapped fortune cookie that would tell me one day I would once again be with someone that I loved so I could order two meals instead of one and get the free crab rangoons that you hated but I always got anyway.



Reproduction
By Anastaciya Pellicano



1999

By Paula Gonzalez

My Mom and Dad came from Colombia.
It was all they knew. I was almost three years old.
They left everything there besides one suitcase each.

I took a trip to Las Vegas once, with you.
We gambled. We had fun.
We lost.

Money is energy.
Money is power.
Without money, we may die.

When you've lived in the United States for as long as I
have
you forget how most places in the world live.
Mom and Dad knew moving here wouldn't just benefit us.

On that Vegas trip, I happily lost the money we gambled.
We can blame the tequila shots and the double refills from
Fat Tuesday.

We can blame the power and energy money brings.

Because twenty US dollars helps my disabled aunt for a
week.

I sent her fifty dollars once and she cried because my
uncle's taxi was in the
shop until next week. His most reliable source of income.

Mom and Dad knew they were able to use that power for
good.

The energy of making a day's pay in one or two hours.
The power it felt to make it in America when you come
from nothing.

When I told you I felt lucky, drunk in the lobby of the New
York, New York
and you asked me why since we lost seven hundred dollars
I said it was a generational win, a familial one.

Because what great power I felt to lose
With no consequence.
To know all my energy, my hard work, provided me a
cushion to soften the blow.

Mom and Dad are proud. They own a home in a nice
neighborhood.
Mom painted the outside yellow and Dad has a mancave in
the garage
and I'm proud to be an immigrant who's terrible at
gambling



Loyalty

By Kelly Boucher

Across our shared room she sobbed
I felt awful as I wanted her to feel safe
Although crying is a textbook form of release
Better than having no emotion at all like in a depression
Quickly she began laughing uncontrollably
She was all over the place, yet I stayed loyal

It can change lives, being loyal
It causes less people to feel so sad that they sob
Yet sometimes emotions are uncontrollable
It takes a lot of trust for someone to feel safe
What if I'm the one who is depressed
What if I need a strong release

The past is something I have released
As I have lost all my important people, they are not loyal
I get it, mental illness hits, and we become depressed
Human beings that cry at the drop of a pin, sobbing
At the fact that the world is unsafe
Aware that life is something in which we cannot control

Control, control, control
That may be how we release
Controlling is how we feel safe
Control is repetitive and proves loyalty
When we are in control we do not sob
At the drop of a pin and are not depressed

What is the face of depression
Is it someone who is unable to control
Themselves when things make them upset, sobbing
Is a chemical reaction that releases
Oxytocin, a chemical that is loyal
To our makeup because without it we are unsafe
When it comes to safety, it is not ideal to be depressed

Though depression may feel loyal or may feel like
something we can control
But it is much less harmful to release emotions by crying,
weeping, sobbing



New York: The Memoir

By Hailey Stevens

New York is the city that never sleeps. No matter when or where, people are constantly shuffling about. Horns are always blaring, different music from the kiosks and shops echo through skyscrapers. People are talking, yelling, or whistling. There is constant noise. However, if one walks to 180 Greenwich Street all they will hear is the rushing of water.

The 9-11 Memorial and Museum rests in a plaza between dozens of skyscrapers. Names are etched into bronze walls with twin waterfall pools encasing the memories. Every name belongs to a victim of the 9-11 attacks and World Trade Center bombing. People trace their fingers over their loved one's name. Children who don't quite understand the tragedy rest their heads on the barriers. When I visited, I was one of those kids. I did not know any of the 2,983 names. These people weren't my friends or family. I didn't know why we were supposed to be sad. I didn't understand until I went underground.

Where I stood, two towers used to. We were at Ground Zero. The cavity that once held a building was now holding a room full of memories. The first thing I saw was a rusted column in the center of a dim room. On it, were the names of dozens of fire stations. There were bent firetrucks and shredded hoses. I remember seeing a wall of cables that were once used to support the two towers. Now they lay askew and rusted. The left wall of the room was once a slurry wall built when the World Trade Center site was unearthed. The soaring ceilings emphasized the scale of the wall and many tourists crowded around to snap a photo. On another wall was a map of the United States, only there was a significance to it. Yellow lights showed the routes planes took on September eleventh. I remember tracing my hand over them and asking my uncle why these planes were important. He told me that these were the hijacked planes. There was a walkthrough of the 9-11 attacks. Around the

room lay bicycle racks bent in half, cars squashed flat, and everyday objects torn. Tv screens were set up on certain walls. Videos of the planes crashing and flying over everyone's head played. A red bandana was encased in glass and behind it was "the story of the red bandana." A citizen jumped into the role of rescuer before the South Tower collapsed. He wore a red handkerchief as a mask and saved ten people. I skimmed the story; he carried a woman and ushered many others down multiple flights of stairs. He died in the building's collapse. As I looked around the room, I saw destruction. People had tears streaming down their cheeks. Some were shaking and others were solemn. Everyone in the room had the same look on their face. Sorrow.

There was a hallway branching off from one of the other exhibits. A script was lying on a foldable table. The pages were full of dialogue. The characters were telling people that they loved them. Others mentioned an attack. I didn't know what I was flipping through, but it made me sad. I heard voices coming from down the hall and grabbed my mom's hand. She pulled me and my brother toward the noise. Everyone was standing around, staring at a screen. A video was playing, only there were no pictures. There were just words. I realized that the script I read wasn't just a play. It was the recordings of Flight 93, the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania. I heard the voices of the passengers. A woman was leaving a message for her daughter. Her voice was croaky like she had been crying. I turned to my brother and saw his cheeks wet with tears. The mother was sending her last message to her child. She knew she wasn't going to make it. Through multiple phone calls I was thrown into the chaos. People were crying and yelling. "I love you...mommy loves you so much." "We have to do something!" They knew what was happening. The plane was hijacked by terrorists and was heading to the Capital. They decided that if the plane was going down it wasn't going to take anyone else with it.

My eyes darted around and suddenly the dim hall I was standing in dissolved away. I was now on the flight. People

were panicking. “What should we do?” a woman said nervously. “Either way we’re going to die!” someone shouted. A man stood up. His name was Todd Beamer. “Are you ready?” He asked. Everyone around me fell silent. “We are going to storm the cockpit. We’re going to die, there is no changing that. However, we can save Washington.” I felt the panic turn into determination. Everyone knew that they had a mission. Passengers planned to crash the plane in Pennsylvania. The story ended with Beamer saying, “Let’s roll.” When the screen turned black, I glanced around the room. I was back in the hall. People just sighed in silence. Everyone was glassy eyed. I started to cry. The destruction around me didn’t make me sad. The cables and support beams were just objects. When I had voices to connect them to it felt real.

I remember walking through an area with panels covered in smiling faces. There were photos of men and women. In the center of the room was a sectional. One side read “In Memoriam.” Behind the other were a couple machines. People crowded around in small groups. The technology had a screen full of the photos on the walls. There was a search option on the screen that allowed loved ones to search for a victim’s name. I saw their faces. As I skimmed the wall, I realized that these people smiling back at me used to walk above. I was standing on the site where they came to work. The story that was talked about in school was just fact. Now it seemed personal.

As we walked back up to the surface, there was a wall of blue. Square canvases were lined up on a grey wall. In the center was the quote “No day shall erase you from the memory of time.” The shades of blue and grey represented the color of the sky on September eleventh. Some were light with happiness, others looked like smoke. I remember looking up at the wall and understanding. The day was like any other, until the city was covered in ash. As we marched up the stairs we came down, I realized there was another staircase to our right. These stairs were roped off and worn. Some of the steps were chipped and others nonexistent. As

we continued to walk, I noticed a sign next to the banister. On it read “Survivors’ Stairs.” Hundreds of people raced down the steps to safety. I could picture the frantic people skipping steps and pushing others to survive. Out of the thousands who died, it was incredible that this was still standing.

When we opened the glass doors of the museum, only this time to exit, I saw a blue steel building. It rose above the other skyscrapers. I asked my mom what it was, and she said it was the Freedom Tower. The One World Trade Center was the result of a recovery project after the 9-11 attacks. She pulled us towards its direction. As we jogged down the brick paved streets of New York, all I could think about was the city’s strength. It was torn down, but instead of trying to forget about the attacks, it decided to embrace them. The Freedom Tower is a celebration of growth.

Once we arrived at the skyscraper, we entered an elevator. The elevator ascended and screens encased us, taking us back in time. We saw the New York skyline evolve over hundreds of years. From cabins and colonies to an urban development, New York City grew in size. When the elevator doors opened, we were 1,776 feet above street level. The building’s height was a nod to the year when the Declaration of Independence was signed. We stepped out of the elevator and were welcomed with a 360° view of the city. I remember walking up to a window and leaning on the glass. I pressed all of my body weight against it. I saw the “Big Apple” in its entirety. I saw the whisking of yellow taxis and darting of black Uber cars. Swarms of people walked around Time Square. I could see the ads bouncing from screen to screen, the Empire State building, and the Rockefeller Center. It was as if I was surrounded in Movie Magic.

A project of recovery became the celebration of a city. From a cavity of memories to a skyline of New York, I saw the impact a tragedy could have. It can make entire buildings crumble and many lives shatter, but it can also cause people to unite. In the view of the city, I saw the

strength of the Brooklyn Bridge, the sadness in the dark waters, and the chaos in the streets below. Most say that New York has an energy like no other. As I looked through the glass, standing a thousand feet above NYC, this energy rushed through me. Up there, all one hears is the sound of every other tourist admiring the view; cameras snapping, “oohing” and “ahhhing”, and “Say Cheese!” But a couple of blocks away on Greenwich Street, the only noise is the rushing of water.



San Diego Seals

By Madelyn Hesse



Three Songs

Andrew Fehr

Check out the audio files of three original songs by Andrew Fehr:

- “May I Have this Dance?”
- “Alone at a Train Station at Night”
- “Into Aether”

All three can be found at <http://litmag.scf.edu>

Contributor Biographies

Daibelis Almonte: Associate in arts student, currently exploring my love for writing through a creative writing class. I had a poem published as a child, and I still remember the feeling of seeing my work and name in a publication.

My name is **Kelly Boucher**. I am a transfer student at SCF for the Fall semester. I am a Applied Sociology major at the University of Tampa. I enjoy writing, painting, volunteering and the beach! Thank you for the opportunity to submit my work. This story is somewhat personal with a bit of a twist.

My name is **Andrew Fehr** and I am a Gator Engineering student with SCF. I am an electrical engineering major and plan on using my skills as an engineer in combination with my creativity as an artist to create things people have never seen before!

Gabriella Garcia: I am a dual enrollment student who has a secret writing passion. I am taking my first creative writing class this semester and plan to take more in the future. I enjoy writing high fantasy fiction and poetry that usually comes from the darker parts of my mind. This is the first time anybody other than my classmates and professor will be reading my work.

Paula Gonzalez: This is a braided poem about my family and the financial impact of immigrating from Colombia, where I was born. I titled it 1999 because that is the year we arrived to the US.

Hello my name is **Madelyn Hesse**, I am a student at The State College of Florida in Venice. I enjoy taking online classes as it gives me the opportunity to do things I enjoy. Such as writing and photography. I have taken some

photography classes in high school. I enjoy taking photos wherever I travel, and love to share my art.

Priscilla Kuhar is a freelance media creator currently completing her A.A Degree studies at the SCF Venice Campus and will be transferring to the University of Tampa next summer to complete her degree in Mass Media Communications. When she isn't pursuing her studies, Priscilla can often be found photographing a variety of subjects such as SCF's native wildlife, notable Florida landmarks, or SCF club events for Phi Theta Kappa and Phi Beta Lambda. In her spare time, she can be doing camera operations at the Port Charlotte Sports Park during Spring Training, and various videography projects for the Phi Beta Lambda 2021-22 Social Media Ambassadors Team. Priscilla loves what she does, whether it is photography, videography or doing professional work behind a camera lens.

Samanta Kunkle: Based on real life experiences, with a mixture of fiction and false reality, a short story on an event in my life during a period of growth between my childhood and adulthood, and the realization that I won't always be alone in life.

My name is **Elexis Lamparello** and I've been a proud Floridian all my life. My passion for writing stems from using it as a coping mechanism to overcome the loss of my brother who passed away on Valentine's Day in 2012. Since then, I've been writing short stories and poetry and publishing them anywhere I could. I got to reach out to a few thousand people on a blog a couple of years back and chat with people who related to my poetry; I found that I could make the world a better place just by letting others know that they are not alone in their struggles. So, I'm currently pursuing my degree in English Literature so that I might become a college professor who can teach others how words really do have the power to change people's

lives and that they make the world a better place with them.

Laura Paquette is a freelance writer originally from Atlanta. She has a degree in Spanish from the University of Georgia, and her true passion is writing. When she's not brainstorming ideas for her first novel, Laura can be found watching movies, reading, searching for the best local coffee shops, and traveling.

Hailey Stevens: This piece was written in my ninth-grade year at Venice High. It is about my experience at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum when I was twelve years old. Currently, I am an ADE student at SCF, enrolled in my first semester. I play pickleball, paint, and love to be creative.

LeAnna Cruz: I am a CNA, who loves to read and care for animals in my spare time. I am taking a creative writing course with Dr. Ford and have really enjoyed writing this semester.

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