The Great Lake Review
SUNY Oswego’s Literary Magazine
Spring 2016

The Great Lake Review is open to submissions throughout the year.

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The Great Lake Review  
SUNY Oswego’s Literary Magazine  
Spring 2016

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**Special Thanks**  
Laura Donnelly  
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Located at 19 W. Bridge Street in downtown Oswego, the River’s End Bookstore is GLR’s off-campus home. Every year the River’s End holds the release events for our fall and spring issues.

All of us at GLR would like to extend a special thank you to everyone at our favorite independent bookstore, especially Bill and Mindy.

THANK YOU RIVER’S END!
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Adamo Ignis
Dana Rae Hagberg
The phone rings. He stands over the sink, holding his arm under the running water.

“Are you coming to the concert?”

“Why not?”

“No man, it won’t be like last time, I swear. I told you, I’ve been clean since last time.”

“Well yeah, the stuff’ll probably be there. Do you have any faith in me at all? Besides, I stopped taking my medicine, so it’s not like I’m an addict anymore. You know the meds only amplified the stuff’s effects. Got drunk and high twice as fast when I was taking that medicine.”

“Yeah, I remember that. No, I mean, I don’t remember you dragging me outside or all that puke you’re talking about, but yeah, I remember that. But I told you, it’s different.”

“Yeah, I’m clean. Really. I am.”

“Yes, I mean it, I’m in control of myself and I’ll be in control tonight. You’ll have nothing to worry about. Hell, you can get as trashed as you want. I’ll keep an eye out for you.”

“Great. Glad to hear it. I’ll see you there tonight.”

He hangs up and finishes wrapping the deep gash on his arm with fresh bandages. It bleeds through into the sink and he tries washing it down the drain. But it keeps bleeding.
Pellow Yurple
Ashlie Woodcock

Have you ever stared at the sun? Sure
you have, everyone does sometimes.
Imagine that imprint, you know,
that purple-yellow shadow haze
that outline memory of what
you tried to see?

Like being high, kind of, I mean not really, not too much but the haze. That kind of fuzzy outline no matter how hard you think it just won’t sharpen to a point?

Or like when you are just about to fall asleep just turned off the light and the room is so much darker than it really is and nothing is in focus everything is too soft and nothing looks right but if you flick the light on nothing looks right.

Or, or, like being drunk, yeah? Except when you’re drunk everyone else is hazy, not yourself, every thought is blindingly brilliant but the floor, others, words, the number of shots, those are blurred but only if your mouth could catch up to your brain.

And that yellow-purple shadow idea, it just jolts away no matter what haze that keeps it from the center of your gaze.
Bareback
Lindsay Karback

I woke up to a dark room illuminated by the bright screen of my IPhone. The silk of a sheet-less, bareback mattress catching on my skin; the feeling of a hole and stuffing under my naked legs where the beagle successfully dug in; the smell of musty laundry. Comprehending where I was, the “Oops, I did it again” feeling followed by a wave of comfort and familiarity filled me as my head throbbed and I realized what had awoken me. “Ding,” it went off again and I make to grab it, careful not to jostle the limp arm that is draped across me from behind. The name on the screen makes my stomach drop, not out of guilt, but for some other reason I cannot grasp. “Are you ok?” “Just wanted to make sure you got back alright.” I slide the phone back on the nightstand without knocking over the various half empty Bud Light bottles that litter it. But before I can settle back into sleep I feel the arm tighten over my torso. “Who is it,” he asks in the usual groggy, monotone voice that I’ve become too accustomed to. “Just a friend,” I answer sleepily, trying to brush the question off in the hopes I can avoid it until the morning. “You mean your boyfriend.” “Ex,” I say rolling over to face him, not quite sure how to reassure him or if I even care enough to. My nose presses into his beard that smells of wet, stale cigarettes and beer. It’s like that smell that clings to every inch of you after a house party. The smell that causes you to soak in a shower for 30 minutes the next day with your head feeling like it has been hit by a bus. The smell that haunts your room with the remainder of the night’s regrets and mistakes if you don’t wash your clothes immediately after. The smell that the boy back home, the one whose eyes creased in the corners and closed when he smiled after he told me I could do better, would never carry. And yet here I was forcing that unwanted smell into my nostrils.
A Bath in a Tub

Lucki Cooper

Based on a FB Post by Ishara Harris

If there were a way to actually
collect tears, I would have
a whole bath full

sinking into silk sheets, staring
at the golden streaks shimmering
through the dimmed clouds

droplets of rain beat off
the overhead window, our glass
shield, a way to keep out the mourning

son weeping over his lost
star. The one I clambered
up the porcelain depths for, her

warmth reached for the shallow surface
near my bed and I had to pursue
I apologize for making you start

anew
I come from a microscopic town in Upstate New York, in what everybody there says is the heart of dairy farm country. They’re not wrong—I’m sure it’s gotten better since my early days—but the place is mostly cows. And white people, mostly of French and German heritage. If you were at all “ethnic” it was likely that you were either one of the underpaid illegal Mexicans (Not sure if they were Mexican, but here you might as well have been) working on the farms or in the dish-pits at restaurants, or you were one of the occasional black people, or you were the token Italian guy that came into town to open a pizzeria. Other than that you were probably a Mennonite, a path my particular lineage deviated from, which is something I can only describe as Electric-Amish. There was probably about as much sexism as there is any place else in America, and if you were in the closet you probably just kept it safely closed until you graduated and left.

This town was a sort of black hole. If you stayed in this place too long you’d stay forever. If you left you just never came back. One exception was my parents, who’d exposed themselves to the world via my father’s service in the Navy. Dad spent time in other countries with people from all over the states; Mom lived in every state where he was stationed. Being the youngest of the three, I have only a few fragmented memories from this time. I remember when we moved in with Dad’s parents for a little while, and then I remember turning three. But I know their experiences granted them some perspective before their return to Upstate New York, which was factored into the way I was raised—and for that I am eternally grateful. I grew up with what I think is close to true sense of right and wrong.

Though my mom was very much the domesticated housewife during my father’s time in the Navy—she had three boys, so she had to stay home just to make sure the house would stay intact—when we returned to New York that changed. Mom worked at pharmacies, banks, and doctor’s offices. Dad worked at paper mills using operating software, now well paid for his career experience in the Navy. When my brothers were old enough to work their first job was to find a job. When they found one, they saved up and bought themselves a truck, or a three-wheeler, or whatever else they wanted but didn’t really need. My parents weren’t afraid to help us out by paying a bill every now and then, if we screwed up or had bad luck. It was a matter of love, honor, and respect.
that we didn’t take advantage. We all pulled our own weight in this family, but that didn’t mean we couldn’t lend each other a helping hand if one of us needed it. I’m sensing a political allegory here.

I was raised to be tolerant. Very clear and simple rules: don’t be assholes to people just because they are different from you. Racism and misogyny are not permitted—homophobia and homosexuality wasn’t an issue that was addressed. Sex in general was not talked about, except for drunken jokes around the family bonfires.

But I’ve heard my parents say things that sound and might be racist. I’ve heard my father use the “N” word. It’s not his favorite word, but he grew up around white people saying it. He doesn’t own a white hood. He’s made comments that aren’t politically correct—probably no different from comments you would find in the interior monologue of any working class person who’s lived long enough to make observations and inferences. But these facts jarred me for a while. I knew what political correctness was; after all I’d seen plenty of talks about it on TV. I didn’t like what I’d heard, but I didn’t make accusations. I asked questions.

I asked my father if he’s ever hung out with black people in the Navy. This was his reply as I recall, and I may be paraphrasing a bit: “Sure I hung out with plenty of them. I worked beside them every day. I made really good friends with a few—but here’s the thing: once they’re around other black people it’s like they don’t know you anymore, and you don’t know them.”

Do I think my dad is a racist? No, I think he’s observant—albeit scorned and carrying a bit of contempt. It’s hard to blame people who make an effort and have it thrown in their face.

I believe it was around that same time of when I’d questioned him that my mother was working as a sales clerk at Kinney Drugs. I remember the night she came home from work crying. She sat outside on the front porch that night and smoked a half pack of cigarettes. Marlboro Reds, I remember. It was the first pack I would buy years later. Ten-year old me would take them out of her mouth and toss them, then she’d light another. She hadn’t smoked in ten years; in fact, we’d just gotten my father to quit.
Owl and the Frog
Emily Clarke
INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

The ALARM CLOCK goes off while BRAD (24) is sleeping in his bed, unaffected, in his underwear, drooling on his pillow with an Xbox controller in his hands. Brad wakes up and glances at the clock.

BRAD

Oh shit!

EXT. STREET - IN TOWN - DAY

A speed-limit sign reads 35 along a stretch of road leading to an intersection with a traffic light.

INT. SPOTLESS TOYOTA CAMRY

NICE GUY(30) drives by the sign dressed in a baby-blue sweater, hair combed, whistling Taylor Swift and nodding to the beat while driving exactly 35.

INT. MESSY GRAND AM

Brad is speeding, wolfing down a Quarter Pounder while checking his tie and hair in the mirror. System of a Down plays on the stereo.

INT. SPOTLESS TOYOTA CAMRY

Nice Guy stops at a red light, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel and singing.

NICE GUY

(sings)

I knew you were trouble when you walked in!
INT. MESSY GRAND AM

Brad bites open a ketchup packet, stuffs his mouth full of fries, and then points the ketchup packet at his mouth as he speeds toward a green light. The light turns yellow. Ketchup doesn’t come out, so he squeezes harder. Ketchup explodes into his eyes. The light turns red.

INT. SPOTLESS CAMRY

Nice Guy’s light turns green and he drives forward, bobbing his head to the music.

EXT. TOWN - INTERSECTION

Brad’s car T-bones Nice Guy. Both cars tumble from the force of the collision and come to a stop upside-down with both driver’s sides facing each other just a few meters apart.

TIME STANDS STILL as everything freezes with the exception of Brad and Nice Guy who are both bruised and bleeding, pressed against their seats by the triggered airbags.

THEY CANNOT MOVE, THEY CAN ONLY LOOK AROUND.

Brad sits, stupefied, with a long fry dangling from his mouth, blinking the ketchup out of his eyes. A geyser of water shooting from a broken fire hydrant stays frozen still.

Millions of water droplets are suspended in the air along with leaves and debris. A smooth, classy male voice speaks.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Now if a crash like that doesn’t put lead in your pencil, I don’t know what will.

THE MAN IN BLACK, a tall, pale man with red eyes and a black suit walks by the fire hydrant. Water droplets that touch him sizzle and turn to little puffs of steam.

He walks between the two cars and stoops down to speak to
Brad and Nice Guy, looking back and forth between the two of them. He turns to a dumbstruck Brad.

**MAN IN BLACK**
Hello, Brad. Pleased to meet you.

The man extends a hand, Brad reaches for it.

**BRAD**
Um...hi.

The man yanks his hand back and slicks his hair.

**MAN IN BLACK**
Ha! I still got it!

**NICE GUY**
Well that sure was a doozy I hope you’re doing okay over there!

**BRAD**
(to Man in Black)
Who the fuck are you, man?

**MAN IN BLACK**
Aw, man I hoped you’d guess my name. This is embarrassing.

**BRAD**
(shrugs)
Sorry.

**MAN IN BLACK**
Oh, it’s fine. I guess fame isn’t forever.
(rolls his eyes)
Allow me to introduce myself.

**NICE GUY**
I’m sorry guys, I hate to be a bug in you ear, but-
MAN IN BLACK
(to Nice Guy)
Shut the fuck up, Randy! Anyway.

The Man in Black shakes his head.

MAN IN BLACK (CONT’D)
Screw it. I’ll just get to the point. You, sir, have a choice to make. You or him.

BRAD
Him or me? What for?

MAN IN BLACK
This was quite an accident. You can't both walk away from this. So between you and I, I've seen your car insurance policy. The way your rates are about to spike, maybe opting out of this world’s not such a bad idea.

BRAD
Aren’t you going to ask him?

MAN IN BLACK
Him? Fuck no!

BRAD
Why not? Why do I have to choose?

MAN IN BLACK
Why did you need a double quarter pounder with cheese for breakfast? Come on, don’t act like you take life seriously now.

BRAD
I want to know. Really. What’s the point and why am I choosing?
MAN IN BLACK
Fine. OK. Look, being an eternal cosmic entity gets boring. Watching you people gets boring, I mean you're either sleeping, eating, or in the bathroom like most of the time. So we mix things up when we can. Randy over there always does the nice thing. He'd choose himself to die just because choosing you would be rude. It's bland. Predictable. He's like a fuckin’ saltine cracker. But you? You don't always make the noble decision. We can have a good time with you.

BRAD
Look, I don’t want to kill anyone, especially not if he’s a nice person!

MAN IN BLACK
And that guy is the nicest, believe me. He actually pays for TV and music. But you don’t want to die either, do you? There’s no XBox in Hell. We just play Uno.

BRAD
No, I don’t.

Beat.

BRAD (CONT’D)
Ugh this fucking sucks. I can’t do this. I defer the choice to him.

MAN IN BLACK
You don’t want to die, but you don’t want to have to be the one who chose to live, is that right?

BRAD
I guess.

MAN IN BLACK

If you say so.

The Man in Black looks at Nice Guy.

MAN IN BLACK (CONT’D)

Alright, it’s up to you! Who dies?
You or him?

NICE GUY

Well, the heck with that guy! I wanna live!

BRAD

What the fuck, man?

MAN IN BLACK

They don’t call me the Father of Lies because of my overwhelming honesty. Nobody fucking reads anymore, I swear to God.

The Man in Black pulls an apple from his pocket, wipes it on his sleeve, and takes a bite.

MAN IN BLACK (CONT’D)

See you in Hell, Brad!

TIME UNFREEZES

Brad’s car explodes.

FADE TO BLACK
Shoot
Gabrielle Darling

It’s dark and quiet, the wind doesn’t even whistle through the trees. The whole forest is asleep - the owls have come to nest and the turkeys are hiding in the thick clumps of pines. Everything is still except for the occasional rustle from where my father and I sit. Our backs are wedged firmly into the trees and neither one of us move as we survey the leaf-covered ridge ahead of us. Rays of light slowly hit the trees, casting a glimmer on the wet leaves along the forest floor. My dad leans comfortably into the rough bark, his mask pulled tightly up to his chin. The gun sits firmly but calmly in his hands, the barrel leans out across his chest, tilted slightly upwards so no mistakes can be made. It fits him, this long metal and wood instrument, fits his large rough hands and broad chest. It doesn’t make him shrink and cave under its weight, even as he appears to be dozing in the early morning light. I know the second there’s movement the stock will be locked firmly against his shoulder and the barrel will sight his target into place, one quick fluid stroke and it’ll be ready. His camouflage fits well and he blends into the background even from where I sit next to him. The only thing that lets me know he’s still there is the deep slow breathing and the occasional blink of his eyelids. I stare at the stock of the gun, the part that fits into my shoulder, scared to death of the forceful kick that will knock me back into the trees if I get the chance to shoot something myself. I wish I would grow a little faster, just enough to be able to take the shock of a hit or be able to lift this machine easily. When I stagger under its weight it’s hard to know if I’m ready for it.

**

“Pull it in tight,” my dad instructs me, stepping behind and cramming the stock into my thin and bony shoulder. I pull it in as tightly as I can manage and attempt to raise the gun to my target – a lonely little pork n’ beans can sitting on a fencepost about ten yards away. It’s heavy; the barrel keeps drooping to the ground every time I raise it. I spread my legs apart in an attempt to give myself leverage, knowing that when I’m sitting I won’t have this luxury.

“Good, now take your time,” he says stepping away to stand at the side. He crosses his arms and watches, standing perfectly still as he waits for me to pull the trigger. He might stand still, but he’s excited. I can hear it in his voice, in his mind there’s already an eight point buck standing in front of me. I’ve only got to pull one little lever for it to be mine. He’s
so proud that his eldest is finally old enough to go hunting, something that made his own year when he was a kid. To go out and bullshit with his brothers and friends about the size of their bucks and does, sharing hunting stories and mishaps with the old timers, feeling a part of a warm circle of friends and finally being able to take his place among them.

The effects of this event sound wonderful, but I'm not there yet and itchy trigger finger I do not posses. I stare down the barrel trying to line the little nub at the end with my target and hold it there for more than three seconds. It’s heavy and my arm and shoulder ache with the weight of the gun. A breeze whips up and the can shivers and jitters as I line up on it. I try to imagine what it’s like to have a living breathing creature on the end. It’s hard to be excited when there’s a life on the end of this machine.

I mumble “I’m sorry,” and yank back on the trigger. The gun blows backward into my shoulder and the can flies into the air, doing a perfect flip before landing with a dent on the ground. I reload immediately, popping the old casing out and pushing in a new one, just as I've been taught. My hands are shaking and my shoulder aches though, making it impossible to fit the smooth shell into the chamber. My dad walks over and gives me a hand, helping me to pop it in.

“When we get to the woods, you won’t feel any of that, your adrenaline will take care of it all,” he tries to comfort. I only half believe him, I know my adrenaline will be going, but probably not for the same reasons. My eyes look at the can resting on the ground, there’s a perfect hole in the tin and it’s caved itself in from the impact. Just let it be quick, I pray. I glance at my dad, not sure how to phrase my concerns.

“I only half believe him, I know my adrenaline will be going, but probably not for the same reasons. My eyes look at the can resting on the ground, there’s a perfect hole in the tin and it’s caved itself in from the impact. Just let it be quick, I pray. I glance at my dad, not sure how to phrase my concerns.

“Dad, what do we do if I injure it?” I ask.

He takes the gun from me and looks down the barrel.

“If you line up on it, you shouldn’t miss,” he replies. “It's a solid gun that requires a solid target and you’re a good shot.” He gestures to the can convulsing on the ground.

“Still,” I mumble looking at the can weaving haphazardly in the mud as the wind pushes it around.

He looks at me as I stand there rubbing my aching shoulder, trying to stand up straight, but even the breeze jostles my thin frame around. He nods and points to the dense patch of brown striking into the horizon, it’s the woods we’ll be hunting in a few days from now.

“You look for a blood trail and track in through the woods;” he begins, kneeling down and jostling a few brown leaves with his boot. “It should leave a few drops every couple of feet on the leaves.”

I nod as he puts a hand on my shoulder and points at the ground as though we’re following one now. “When we find it you finish the kill –
make it clean and put it out of its pain. Then do better next time.”

He smiles reassuringly. “I’ve injured a couple of deer myself and it’s a messy job, but you always finish it. You don’t let it wander in pain if you can help it.”

I nod and he stands, handing the gun back to me.

“Try it one more time,” he says pointing to the fencepost this time.

I lift it again and take aim.

“Be confident, you can make a clean kill. Just don’t hesitate.”

I take a deep breath and pull back on the trigger.

**

The sun has brightened the woods considerably, everything turning pale yellow and white as it slowly arcs into the sky. I’ve forgotten what it’s like to be up here, to hike along the cool trails and play in the creeks. It seems an age since the last time I came here. My dad’s head slowly turns and he shifts the gun carefully. He nudges me and points towards the gulley. At first I don’t see anything but the same ragged trees and leaf-strewn floor. Suddenly, the branches shift and change. A buck strides into the morning light. I hold my breath and freeze, praying he won’t see us.

His muscles ripple and the sunlight hits his antlers as he proudly steps along the rocks and crevices of the creek bed. He stops in front of a tree, disappearing for a moment as he pauses and scours the ground for greenery. My dad nudges me again and I pull the gun up, managing to raise one of my knees to support the barrel. It’s awkward, being crunched around this device, trying to support it and stay upright, while its weight crushes me. The buck steps out and freezes between two trees, perfectly framed and perfectly still. I lean over the top of the gun lining up on my target. I try to fit my fingers into the trigger, but the fabric of the gloves won’t fit. Slowly I rip off my gloves and roll the sleeves backwards, hoping the buck won’t have moved. He’s still framed between the two trees, although he drops his head and paws the ground, obviously picking up on my movement.

My dad is still, waiting for me to line up and be ready. After a moment the buck turns to the side – a perfect set-up. I take a deep breath and lean my face against the smooth wood of the stock, sighting my target. The gun is drawn tightly into my shoulder.

“Shoot,” my dad whispers. “Shoot!”

The throat of the deer ripples under his glossy fur. He inhales deeply then exhales a thick white mist that floats upward and tangles in
his antlers. He’s antsy and shuffles the ground impatiently. Just behind his front leg I can make out the subtle movement of a heartbeat. It’s quick and fast-paced, full of adrenaline and anxiety; he’s sensed us now. My own heart beats along with his as I take aim at the rhythm. The trigger is on my finger before I know it and I’ve yanked back. The gun goes off, but I don’t hear it. I don’t feel the shoulder ripping kick as I stare down the barrel at my target. There’s a dusty poof in front of us and when it clears the deer is gone. I reload quickly, stand up, and point the gun upwards all the while feeling numb. Knowing I’m not going to shoot, my dad moves forward and examines the area. In front of us is a broken branch from one of the trees framing the deer and below that a triple skip mark. After some digging my dad recovers the very same bullet I’ve just shot. He turns and grins. I blow air out of my cheeks feeling them heat up and turn to look in the direction the deer has fled.

“Shoot,” I mutter.
Untitled
Victoria Jayne
Kelly always wanted to be buried beneath a willow. She even picked one out, spent an entire day driving until she found the perfect one – overlooking a river, its boughs brushing the water crying leaves onto the surface. Her descriptions had always been beautiful, but Sheila never saw the tree before today.

Sheila got out of the car and hurried around to the passenger side, opened the door. She brushed the limp curls out of Kelly’s face, met her eyes. Forced a smile. Kelly smiled back, tired, but her eyes still shone.

“Help me up?” Kelly asked. She raised an arm, dark skin stretched over thin bone.

(Of course,” Sheila said. They walk-shuffle-tripped over to the willow, ducked beneath its arms.

“I want to face the water.”

Sheila helped her to the ground, settled her in with her back against the bark. She sat down next to her, held her close. Tried not to think about how tiny she was, how frail. Remembered her only as Kelly – lovely Kelly with her thick curls and heady laugh, warm skin and eyes brighter than stars. She was not warm now.

Sheila turned to her, pressed a gentle kiss to her lips, and Kelly smiled. She sat with her till the sky bled orange and the warmth had seeped away. Then she stood, pressed a last kiss to Kelly’s forehead, and went back to the car to grab the shovel.

She had always wanted to be buried beneath a willow.
He had said his name was Gene and poured me a glass of orange juice and made me a paper swan.

He was ugly to anyone but me. Those thin rubbery veins twisting around his skinny arms were like ropes of beads sewn into his flesh. The crooked nose and thick lips, caught in a blender and punched by a bully. The deep sea eyes, shades of underwater monsters and icy lakes. I wanted to touch his hair and tell him that I loved him when I first saw his magic.

It was in his fingers. He picked up his squares of paper and made creatures dance. To the waitresses he gave puckered lotus flowers in shades of gray and pink, Chinese drawings dripping on the tips. But when he saw me sitting at the counter, alone with book and usual plate of jellied toast and over-easy eggs, runny yolk soaking the bread, he had pity on the lonely bookworm.

“I have a great feeling you adore things with wings,” he said. “I’m Gene. Allow me.”

A glass of orange juice. His fingers weaving through the paper—the birth of a violet swan. I grinned a yellow smile, my teeth coated in yolk. The swan flew into my hands.

“She’s lovely. What’s her name?”

“It’s up to you to christen her.”

“But you brought her to life.”

“God didn’t name the animals, my dear.”

He was a memory in my mouth and a stranger to my soul. I liked his smile and his fingers; like a painted clown with balloon animals. I asked him what he liked to do when he wasn’t making paper zoos.

“I write bad poetry,” he said. “And walk on stilts around my garden.”

“How bad? How tall?”

“Burnt popcorn bad and high enough to taste the clouds.”

“I want to taste them too. What flavor?”

“Nougat and sap—man-made and natural.”

“Like your paper zoos.”

“Like my paper zoos.”

We met two days after that for coffee at my sister Maggie’s cafe. It was dark and cramped and warm, like the inside of a thimble. We huddled in the table in the corner with the wobbly chair and taught each
other tricks with our tongues. Gene could fold his into a hot dog. I could
do mine into a clover.

“I’m jealous,” he said. “And I hardly covet anything.”
“You Catholic, confessing your sins to me.”
“I’m an open book—I confess to God at football games.”

Gene bought me hot chocolate in a paper cup and said he was
taking me someplace to explore.

“You love books, I think. Your fingertips are smooth.”
“All I see are scars and paper cuts.”
“Perhaps a bit of both.”

We drove in Gene’s car to a fountain in a tiny town I had never
heard of. The fountain was wedged in the middle of an English garden,
neatly flossed shrubs and shaved hedges tucking it away like a hidden
jewel. I gasped and grabbed Gene’s hand in shock. Blocks of gigantic
books made of stone were piled high, water flowing from their open pages
and tilted spines—a fountain of literature, swimming.

I ran to it, too excited to breathe. Jumping up on the edge of a
book, I perched like a cat and stared down into the pool of water rippling
below. Coins like fish scales glittered on the bottom. I flattened and lay
on my stomach, kicking my feet and watching the dance—water, pages,
covers, words. Who said books couldn’t get wet?

Gene climbed on the other side of the fountain, sitting on a giant
copy of Little Women. He grinned and pulled something from his pocket.
He slid it down the spine of a book; it landed soundlessly in the water and
began to float toward me.

The sleeping paper cat bobbed on the diamond water. I touched
its folded nose with the tip of my finger.

“Cats don’t like water,” I said.
“This one does.”
“She’s beginning to crumble.”
“Good things are messy.”

Gene proposed to me a year after that. I said no. He bought me
cider and folded me a paper bunny and asked me why.

“You’re perfect,” I said. “That’s hard to measure up to.”
“Who said anything about measuring? I like to guess.”
“Be serious Gene, who stays together anymore these days?”
“People who want real love.”
I bit my tongue. My voice was soft.
“I don’t want you to get sick of me.”
“Who’d get sick of sunshine?”
“You always answer with questions.”
“Maybe they’re actually metaphors.”
Gene kissed my hand and tucked a paper rose behind my ear. He smiled and rubbed my fingers and stared out the window at the settling fall. I sighed.
“Fine. I will.”
Gene closed his eyes. It was the first time I saw him cry.

The month after our wedding we spent traveling the world. Germany and Russia and New Zealand and China. We left little trails of paper when we walked the Great Wall and danced in St. Petersburg. We made love out of paper in the bed of us. Gene kissed my neck. I giggled and skipped out of reach.
“So elusive! Like a queen on her throne, untouched.”
I placed the crude paper crown around my head and put my hands on my hips. My brows furrowed.
“As queen I ask you to give your life for the sake of the royal crown,” I said.
“You ask but do not command?”
I raised my chin and glanced away.
“I pity the peasant-folk.”
Gene leapt from the bed and swung me into his arms. We danced and laughed and jumped too much; the hotel complained. We left the next day.

Three years into our marriage we got pregnant with twins. I bloated to the size of a baby beluga and craved bread and mashed potatoes. Gene went out everyday and bought loaves of bread and sacks of potatoes. I grinned when we walked through the door, juggling the grocery bags.
“And I’m not even Irish,” I said.
Gene set the things on the counter and walked over to me sitting on the couch. I was watching The Lion King. He sat beside me and looked down at my big belly. He pulled out two paper babies from his pocket and set them on my stomach. I watched his welling eyes and squeezed his hand.
“What’s wrong?” I asked.
“Nothing, absolutely nothing,” he said. He kissed my collarbone and leaned into my neck. “You really are a queen.”
I watched Simba explore the elephant graveyard on the TV. My lips trembled. I still got nervous around Gene.
“I was in love with you even before you gave me the swan to keep,” I said.
Gene looked up at me and wrapped himself around me and my bigness.

“Tell me a poem,” I said. “A bad one.”

“Doubt thou the stars are fire…”

On our sixth anniversary Gene told me his body had started aching. The twins, Fred and Winnow, stayed with his parents while we went to the doctor. Gene gave them each laminated paper frogs before we left. When we came back from the fourth appointment a few weeks later we brought orange juice and paper cranes to soften the news.

Five months later he was the guest of honor at a walkathon for ALS. I fetched him lunch and took him out for strolls in his wheelchair when he wasn’t cooped up in the tents folding wishes for everyone. Paper zoos everywhere—elephants and tigers and cranes and pandas and coiled cats. No swans. Those were for me, only.

I sat down beside Gene at the table and swiped an orange sheet from the stack beside him. He turned his head slightly and grinned.

“What do you imagine that paper to be, my darling?” he asked.

“An albatross—orange and on fire like the sun.”

Gene reached over and touched my fingers, the folds.

“I knew you’d like things with wings,” he said.

His eyes swam and I looked away, my hand pressed against his arm.

Winnow cried when her daddy refused to fold a unicorn for her.

“Babydoll,” I said, scooping her up and plopping her on the couch facing the crumpled man in the wheelchair. “It’s not that he’s refusing to.”

“Then why isn’t he taking the paper when I hand it to him?”

I stared at Gene—gorgeous veined arms folded and twisted like a paper creature. Big still eyes, concentrating on the carpet. I liked things with wings—what kind of thing was this? I bit back a scream and buried my face into Winnow’s little back.

We sat on the couch together; him crumpled up beside me, his TV tray stacked with paper and me half asleep on the couch. I was in and out of dreams. I was a blue swan in one and Gene was a hunter. A tiger came out of the woods and tore him to shreds before I could get to him. The moon reached down and clipped my wings. I plunged to my death.

In another we both rode on the back of a giant orange albatross. But its wings were on fire and we ended up burning alive. In all of the dreams, either way, we both died.

Two tormented hours later I woke up. Gene was dead. My first
reaction was to slap him. I slapped him to wake him up. I slapped him for leaving me alone. Then I sobbed into his wrinkled chest. His smell was starting to fade. The smell of paper. I glanced over at the TV tray.

I don’t know how he did it. It was impossible. I guess there was a little magic left in his fingers, a little bit of love in motion. Either that or an angel had put it there to torture me.

In the center of the little brown tray, swimming in a fumbled stack of thin paper squares, poked out a little white head. I carefully picked away the papers, one by one, and tossed them on the ground until only the little folded white swan remained, her neck craned upwards and her wings spread out, ready to take flight.
He kisses like a poet
Kaili Morris

in a place I shouldn’t have been, somewhere, USA

vulnerable, heavily edited.

Each move is deliberate.
His hands outline the structure-

first centered on the page
bodies
pressed together
with the smallest spaces.

Abruptly you are justified
against the right wall.
He reads you carefully
inspecting every inch of your neck
making sure no unnecessary words
made it into your skin.

Count the beat of the syllables
with the smack of lips.
Gasps for air are commas,
pushing him away is a line
break. Pulling him back in
is a Capital Letter.
At The Top of the World
Thomas Bauschke
At five years old, I never wanted to be the fairy princess for Halloween. I yearned to be scary and sometimes I would dress up in a boy’s costume if I couldn’t find a scary one for little girls. Each year, my mother took me to Party City on Suffix Street in Massapequa, and I picked a skeleton mask, Scream mask or even just a mask with boils, lumps and a big, fat nose. My mother didn’t care that I wore pants with a mask, but in October, the kids in Mrs. Chaikin’s class became skeptical of my masculine attire.

Mrs. Chaikin had round glasses and dirty blonde hair. She crossed off the names of my classmates when taking attendance. “Jackie, Chad, Kaashief, David, Brandon, Ijaa?”

“I am here, Mrs.Chaikin,” the girls said. They had box braids lined in their hair and they giggled to each other and used their hands to hold down their polka dotted tutus.

“Tatyana? Are you here?” Mrs.Chaikin asked.

“Yes! I am present, Mrs. Chaikin.” My words often whistled out between the gap in my two front teeth.

“I didn’t recognize you, dear. Oh, how scary you are today!”

“Why do you dress like a boy?” Nino asked, chewing on the eraser at the back of his pencil.

“Uhh. I don’t know,” I said.

Fire burned across my chest as I realized I had the ability to curb the truth. For years, I didn’t have the words to explain why I wanted to dress differently from my other classmates. My family never condemned me for my clothing choices, but my dad wondered why I did not want to wear a dress. Only later did I realize why I didn’t feel comfortable wearing dresses. Dresses felt feminine, and I didn’t always feel feminine in the same way that my female classmates did.

I found it more and more convenient for me to tell myself and others that I was unsure of my sexuality as I grew older. For a time, I didn’t have to think about my sexuality. If I fessed up to myself, I would have to accept my preferences. Until this year, I couldn’t do that.

During winter break, I watched a series of coming-out tapes on LOGO, channel 174, and all the boys and girls cried in front of their parents about their undying desire to date the same sex. In each T.V. episode, the teens are sitting in a living room, and their parents say they always knew their child was gay or bisexual. In fear of rejection, some
children waited years for the right time to tell their parents, who they truly love. I mirrored the youth in the television set who were struggling with their identity. Before my mother returned from her evening shift on Monday nights, she would leave a voicemail that started with “Hi, my love dumpling” and ended with “Is there anything you need to talk about?” I deleted those messages. I tightened my jaw and decided that there was nothing I wanted to talk about.

I hid the names of my female crushes in black and white notebooks, which I locked with a key in my bedroom drawer. During school hours, I walked a brown skinned Haitian girl to her geometry class and hoped that one day we could share a Coca-Cola. The ideas of same sex relations were floating in my head, but they never came to be a reality. Instead, I chose boyfriend after boyfriend and these relationships became a cycle of mixed up emotions in my head. I longed for the girl next door, but I was handed another Ken doll to add to my dumpster collection.

A T-shirt that read on the front, “I support equality 2015” and in the back said, “Out and Proud” was a hearty conversation starter at my grandma’s Sunday dinner.

At my grandma’s house, I stuffed my face with yucca, rice and beans, I watched my 80 year old grandmother peel a couple of yams.

“Are you gay?” my grandmother asked as her glasses slid to the edge of her nose.

“Are ya, Tat?” My mother chimed in. I garbled my words. Jolting up the stairs in my pride T-shirt, I realized that if today was the start of my coming-out story then God chose the wrong time.

Around Thanksgiving, I casually told my cousins about my sexuality while sitting in the front seat of a van; however, it wasn’t until mid January, when I sat my cousins down in the living room that they took what I said seriously.

My cousins have tattoos inked on their shoulder blades, and often I see them shadow boxing in the streets of Amityville. When I was younger, we tousled in the mud and devoured macaroni and cheese. I was the only girl in the family for some years. I loved Barbie dolls and Easy Bake Ovens. They sat in front of the television screen, twiddling their thumbs during another round of the WWE SmackDown.

“Hey, Rajah you know Tot Tot is a pansexual, right?” Justin said.

“Wait? Huh?” Rajah said, as he picked up a burnt cigarillo from the living room floor. Staring at the ceiling, I slowly darted my eyes to my fair skinned relative.

“Yea, it just means that I like people for their hearts, not their parts,” I said.
“Yo, Tot Tot, I am surprised,” Rajah said.
“I told you guys during Thanksgiving,” I replied.
“I love and support ya, Tot Tot. Just don’t push this onto Jaya. I don’t want my sister living that ‘pan’ lifestyle.”

When I go to church, the pastor, a man with a steel ironed suit and paisley colored socks, hollers from the pulpit. Dozens of singers line the stage, and they chant God’s words in rhythmic harmonies.

I consider myself a good Christian woman. I pray for monthly stomach cramp relief, and before annual awards, speeches, and even when I have writer’s block. I occasionally pray for forgiveness. Placing my right hand on the bible, I clench my rosary beads to my chest. According to the Bible, “N either was man created for woman, but woman for man.” However, in my eyes, God was having a bad day. The first time I hear wedding bells, I hope there is a woman standing beside me.

It was Friday, on the living room couch when my mother confessed her love for a man who works as a stockbroker on Wall Street. “He’s a great guy,” my mother said. “I can’t wait until he meets Ma.”

I was happy for my mom. She deserves to smile. However, I felt like my life was a heteronormative nightmare, drenched in marriage, husbands, boyfriends and children. All I hoped for, was a fairytale, where romance wasn’t locked in journals or one night flings. The walls that I’ve guarded for years were no longer to protect myself from my family, they were a barricade to the world.

“I like girls, Mom,” I said. “I still like guys too, but also trans, demisexuals and anyone in between.”

“So you would have sex with a girl?” My mother asked. “You didn’t feel this way before college. Did figure modeling make you gay, sweetie?”

“No, I felt this way for years,” I said.

“So who are you panning with?” My mother questioned. “I support you, Tat, and love you, but what do you mean there’s more than two sexes? God created Adam and Eve. Not Adam and Steve right?”

One mile south of my residence hall in the Mahar building, classroom 203, the professor of my women and gender studies class listed the different gender variations on the board.

“Many people don’t fit into the gender binary,” she said. “The world has socially constructed gender and now it’s your generation who can willingly tear it down.”

After class, I sat on the ledge of the windowsill and a tinted arc appeared in the sky. The sun highlighted the colors that are often unseen. If this is what it means to be out without wearing my pride T-shirt, I’ll wear my colorful stripes in the warmest of shades.
November 25, 2005
I was initiated, dunked into a pool of promises, 
baptized into the Mormon church.

August 16, 2012
The Book of Mormon rested in between her palm and her fingers. 
I didn’t know if I wanted to be her or be with her.

March 21, 2015
I kissed her that day. 
I kissed her all the way into God’s day.

June 2015
My first girlfriend.

June 26, 2015
Same-sex marriage became legal in America. 
I stood in the corner of the block, unable to move, to think, to breathe.

September 22, 2015
Sally que no se atreve ser gay. 
I came out to my mom that day.

November 19, 2015
I thought I could personalize this for myself, but 
I was drowned when I was 8 years old.
The waves curled over the sand, soft crumples of watery fabric bunching up and stretching out. I tempted them to touch me, burying my feet under the sand and standing in wait. The gulls cried overhead, their chaotic song foaming with the waves. I smiled and pulled the sleeves of my sweater over my fingers, the knit reminding me of dry coral; I poked my fingers through the holes.

There was something about standing on the shore with my sweater over my dress and the breeze barely tousling my short hair, and my lips and eyes untouched by makeup; I could’ve, should’ve been mistaken for a siren, an urchin of the sea. I was sure that if there was a boat out on the lake, someone would’ve been enchanted.

But it was too early for fishing and I had no time to meet and woo enchanted fishermen. I was already dangling a man from a hook.

I barely noticed his shadow; it was the flash of brown and yellow and green, the colors of his own sweater that bled from my peripheral vision that made me see him. We stood for a while in loud silence, waves tumbling, drawing back, whipping in the wind like a clothesline, our mouths closed, our lips shut. I shut my eyes when his hand touched mine.

“I’ve missed you,” he said.
“Y ou didn’t call.”
“Neither did you.”
“Where’s that letter you promised me?”
“It got wet.”

Somewhere, a siren hummed, under the dark green waters, singing for her love.

It was a struggle to speak; the sand, the mist, the voices of a drowned lover lumping in my throat, gritty inside my mouth. “I fell in love with you while you were gone,” I said. Tears pinched my eyes, but I felt dry. His arms wrapped around me; I shrunk in his embrace. We collapsed in the sand, him clinging to me like a little boy with a stuffed animal and I like a cat hovering over water, terrified of drowning. “I planned out everything,” I said. “I even bought us an apartment by the sea, so you could be close to home.”

“Let me write you a letter, Jane,” he said. “One that won’t get wet.” Sand puckered in hills around us; the waters crept toward us,
ghostly fingers stroking my toes. I grabbed a fistful of his sweater, my sweater.

“It’s too late,” I said.

The sky sank to gray; a foggy haze settled over the water. I tasted the chill, the wet, the dampness in my flesh. Thunder rolled.

“Jane,” he said.

“Write me,” I said.

“Dear Jane,” he began, “I’ve been thinking about this letter. I already know how it will end, but I refuse to give you up. I’m in love with you…isn’t that enough? I’m sick of the sea, sick of the water, the salt, the sand, I’m—“

The water grabbed us both. The waves sucked us from shore and dragged us into the sea. He screamed my name as I went under. My nose burned with water and my lungs gasped. I held onto his sweater, but he was slipping away, melting, melting into the water. His flesh stretched and turned to wax. Panic shrieked through me.

The water swirled around me, it pulled on my legs and dragged me toward the depths. Foolish, I begged him to rescue me, knowing he could read my thoughts. But he wouldn’t listen; it was his nature.

He was a Siren, and death was what he did.
Landscape with Deer
Emily Clarke
FADE IN.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - CITY - DAY

The store is destroyed. Shelves are fallen, windows are smashed, and almost all of the foodstuffs are gone. A young MAN in his early twenties is standing in an aisle. He is dressed in raggedy clothes. He has a too-full backpack slung over one shoulder. There is a sawed-off shotgun poking out of the top. The Man speaks with a cockney accent.

MAN
Ain’t that some shit right there?
Finally at the front of the queue
and there ain’t a fuckin’ thing on
the shelves.

The Man turns back expectantly.

BUD (O.S.)
Uh-huh

A TIN CAN FALLS.

The Man turns his attention towards it. There is a male zombie shambling out of the door through the broken glass.

MAN
OI MATE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? USE
THE FUCKING DOOR PROPER!

The zombie turns around and starts towards the Man. The zombie trips in the doorway and gets caught. The Man turns back expectantly.

MAN
Some people.

BUD (O.S.)
Uh-huh.

The Man starts out of the store, but stops to pick up a bag of crisps. Behind the counter a zombie clerk is banging his face against a bullet-proof glass barrier.

The Man tosses a wadded up bill at him as he leaves.

MAN
There’s five quid, keep the change.

He opens the glassless door frame and the BELL goes off. The male zombie is grabbing for the Man. The Man nonchalantly steps on the zombie’s fingers with a slight crunch.

MAN
Fuckin’ tosser I tell ya.

The Man turns back expectantly.

BUD (O.S.)
Uh-huh.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Several zombies out front have turned their attention towards the Man. He walks away without paying them any attention. They shamble too slowly to catch up.

MAN
It’s a good thing I found ya when I did, innit? You seem pretty new to this whole thing.

BUD (O.S.)
Uh-huh
MAN
How 'bout a pointer?

BUD (O.S.)
Uh-huh.

MAN
Alright. First off, go for the head. Watch this...

The Man turns towards a female zombie.

MAN (CONT.)
OI! SLAG!

The female zombie turns to the Man and readies for attack. The Man takes the shotgun off his back and points it at the head of the female zombie.

The gun CLICKS and the Man mocks the sound of gunfire. The female zombie continues forward and the barrel of the gun goes into her mouth. She tries to continue advancing but she cannot.

MAN (CONT.)
They’ll pretty much do the job themselves if you let ‘em.

BUD (O.S.)
Uh-huh

MAN
Alright enough.

The Man pushes the gun forward and knocks the zombie to the ground. She struggles but can’t get up. The Man continues as he turns back to the female zombie and throws the ‘two finger salute’.

MAN (CONT.)
Alright. Piss off ya, tart.

The Man turns back in front of himself.

    MAN (CONT.)
    Remind me to find more shells.

    BUD (O.S.)
    Uh-huh

The Man puts the gun away and continues walking. He opens the bag of crisps and pops one into his mouth. He grimaces.

    MAN
    These aren’t really my flavor, you want some Bud?

    BUD (O.S.)
    Uh-huh

The Man tosses the bag back without looking.

    MAN
    You know, you’re a pretty good listener.

    BUD (O.S.)
    Uh-huh

The Man stops walking.

    MAN
    I’m glad I found ya when I did. Wouldn’t want anything bad to happen to ya.

    BUD (O.S.)
    Uh-huh.

A zombie with no arms or bottom jaw walks up behind the Man and rests his mouth on the Man’s shoulder.
MAN  
(jokingly)  
You’re a right cheeky cunt ain’t ya?  

BUD  
Uh-huh  

FADE TO BLACK.
The Old Married Couple
Victoria Jayne

Characters:
Peter: late-teens
Rebecca: late-teens

Setting: the edge of a pond nearing night.

Lights up. PETER is standing while throwing rocks into a pond. REBECCA is sitting while making a grass whistle. REBECCA gets frustrated, because it is actually really fucking hard to make a whistling sound with a piece of grass.

REBECCA
Damn it.

PETER
I can’t believe you are still trying to do that.

REBECCA
Everyone else seems to be able to do it, and when I try, all I do is get spit everywhere.

REBECCA wipes saliva off of her hand onto her shirt. PETER is still throwing rocks.

PETER
Who cares if you can’t do it? You can do other things.

REBECCA
Like what?

PETER
Like being a little shit.

PETER stops to look back at REBECCA who isn’t amused, because in reality Peter is a little shit.
REBECCA

You think you’re so funny.

REBECCA throws a pebble at PETER. PETER gets hit and pretends to be greatly injured by the pebble.

PETER

Oh god, why!

PETER stumbles towards REBECCA and collapses in agony.

PETER

Tell my parents I love them.

PETER “dies” next to REBECCA, but she is unfazed like a cold hearted bitch she tries to be.

REBECCA

God you’re an idiot.

PETER remains motionless for the next line.

PETER

You know you love me.

REBECCA rolls her eyes and lies down. PETER adjust himself to lay next to her. They both look up at the sky. Beat.

REBECCA

Do you think aliens exits?

PETER

You have already asked me this question.

When?

PETER

3 month ago.

REBECCA
Oh… what haven’t I ask you?

*Beat.*

Oh my god.

PETER

What?

REBECCA

We have reached that point.

PETER

What?

REBECCA

I didn’t think this was possible.

PETER

What!

REBECCA

We have exhausted every possible topic of discussion.

PETER

I seriously doubt that.

REBECCA

Think about it. We have talked about the existence of aliens, the possibility of zombies ever existing, the debate of pancakes vs. waffles, why everyone cares about certain people on the internet…

REBECCA

Oh my god.

PETER

We have reached the end of all discussions.

REBECCA

But doesn’t this count as a discussion.
Beat.

PETER
Holy shit, Rebecca. You’re right. You’re talented after all. You can conduct a conversation that lacks in topic.

REBECCA
Are you going to retract your statement of me being a little shit?

PETER
No.

REBECCA
Fine. You’re still an idiot.

PETER
I embrace my stupidity.

REBECCA sits up. She grabs a pebble and throws it into the pond. Peter sits up as well. Beat.

PETER
There is something we haven’t talked about.

REBECCA
And what is that?

PETER
What we’re doing.

REBECCA stops what she is doing, and puts her knees to her face. She doesn’t look at PETER.

REBECCA
What do you mean?

PETER
What are we?

REBECCA
Homo sapiens.
PETER
I don’t mean what we are literally.

Beat.

REBECCA
We’re an old married couple.

PETER
What?

REBECCA
An old married couple. We have basically known each other are whole lives, we have exhausted every known topic to man, and we are one step away from nagging each other.

PETER
We are an old married couple.

REBECCA
Exactly.

PETER
I don’t want to be an old married couple.

REBECCA
You asked what we are and that is what we are.

PETER
But we’re so young.

REBECCA
The old married couple doesn’t care how old you are. It lurks in the shadows, and waits for the exact moment to snatch you up, and never let go. The old married couple has no remorse.

PETER
But, we’re aren’t even a couple.

REBECCA
The old married couple doesn’t care. We fit the label. The old married couple takes whatever it can grab onto.
PETER
Stop! You’re freaking me out. I feel like an actual old married couple is going to attack us at any moment.

REBECCA
The old married couple already has.

*REBECCA moves her hair to reveal gray hair. PETER is stunned.*

PETER
AHH!

REBECCA
What?

PETER
Your hair! It’s gray!

*REBECCA looks at the gray hair.*

REBECCA
Man. I always hoped it would be more of a silver white color.

*PETER squints to look at REBECCA’S hair. He then pulls out a pair of glasses from the pocket of his shirt to look at it. PETER realizes that he is using glasses, because he never owned a pair of glasses to start with.*

PETER
What the fuck?

REBECCA
Poor eyesight is a part of old age.

PETER
How are you so calm?

REBECCA
I embrace my role.

PETER
This is ludicrous.
PETER tries to stand up, but is having difficulty.

REBECCA

Here use this.

REBECCA pulls a cane out from behind a rock. PETER grabs at it, but then realizes that it is a cane because a cane just showed up out of nowhere. PETER is still mid-stand when he says the next line.

PETER

Where did you get that?

REBECCA

It was next to the rock. I thought you could use it.

PETER stands up with the help of the cane. He uses the cane to walk towards the pond. REBECCA pulls out a ball of yarn and begins to knit. PETER has trouble bending over to pick up a rock because arthritis is a bitch. PETER throws a rock in the water.

PETER

I’m too young for these shenanigans.

REBECCA

It’s a real shame that you aren’t accepting your role, Peter.

PETER

What do you know?

REBECCA

Not much, but I’m not afraid to go into the unknown.

PETER

Can’t we just reverse this?

REBECCA

You can’t reverse the aging process Peter. As much as we would like to, it’s a part of being human.

PETER

Why must you go against everything I say?
REBECCA
Because we have reached the final stage.

REBECCA stops knitting to look at PETER.

REBECCA
Nagging.

PETER looks down at the ground. REBECCA stands up with a little difficulty, and walks towards Peter.

REBECCA
Come on Peter. Let’s go home.

PETER looks at REBECCA who takes his arm. PETER and REBECCA exit.

Lights.

END
Angler
Dana Rae Hagberg
Bee barks at the back door as I make my way through the living room. I slide the door open as she sprints into the darkness. As always, I leave the door open for her to come back in when she’s finished.

Walking down the hall, I dim the lights as I make my way to the bathroom. As I begin my nightly routine, I let my mind wonder on the to-do list I have for tomorrow.

Bang.

Letting the water run, I return to the living room to find the source of the noise.

Silence.

Rounding the corner into the bathroom, I pause when I catch a whiff of an all too familiar smell that knots my stomach instantaneously.

Cologne.

I lean down to rinse my mouth and freeze when I realize the water is off.

Tucked in the corner of the mirror is a picture I haven’t seen in months. A picture of me. The one I gave to him.

With each breath, the weight of a brick falls on my chest.

Rushing toward my bedroom, I stumble through the darkness fumbling in my top drawer for the knife I’d hidden.

The knife no one knew about it.

“You made it so easy for me this time.”

His voice released a surge of panic in me.

As my eyes discover the silhouette across from me, the headlights of a passing car sweep across the room illuminating his face and the thick, sharp blade of my knife in his hand.
Drowning Father in the Oven
Jason Tan

verbal blurs – can you shut the fuck up, give me the last few seconds. you can hear her even after the amber light turns off. son, where’s your father? He’ll be here slapped with your stupid bills, and a one hundred and thirty pounds of disgrace. – family weight.

building blocks – I don’t even know what to say, but a hunnit fity for a box of plastic, and you started thinking that this doughnut hole would make you a whole. You get a doughnut. You get a doughnut. And you get a doughnut. You all get a doughnut! ‘Cept, Oprah’s gone, and I was that hole that you fucked out. My childhood is a bitch, and it’s tired of being sore, and there you go building a Lego bridge. I wanted to take it down, bits by bits. Yet your eyes, wary...
– Hold it!

gentle frills – you take the light from the day, but nothing from the night. He comes home, and I see the weight come off. But I’m not it and mom’s not here to carry it. I ask myself, why the kitchen and not me? The silence bleeds you dry, but you continue to drive for me. Your eyes uttered the words: Because. You’re my son. I told myself to let the words slip out, but my pride holds down Mr. Sorry. – Daddy?

water hums – maybe I’ll try my fork in that plate. You brought back tons of paint, but no primer. Maybe you’re here to stay after all, and the words that never came out my mouth, may finally find comfort in the space between us. But your pills did not prime well. I don’t do complicated, but you took out Brokeback Mountain and said it was fine. – our life.


We coulda had a good life together! Fuckin’ real good life!

and so be it, be dead.
She’d been cooking for at least an hour – she wanted to have a nice dinner with what was left of her family. They rarely ever sat down to eat together; no one was ever home at the same time. She set the plates out, folded the napkins, and placed the silverware – the knife on the right side with the cutting edge facing inward. Her parents were divorced years before and she lived with her father and brother. Her sister left even before they’d been divorced. She hadn’t seen said sister in nine years – she was left to be the eldest child now that it was just her and her younger brother. And she tried, she really did.

As she finished up the last of the preparations, she beckoned to her brother at his computer in the room above her and to her father from the screen of his computer in the office below. No one stirred. She waited. She called her brother again – he came. Running down the stairs loudly because he said walking took too long. As if the loud steps of her brother on the stairs were his queue, her father stirred in his basement office and his own slow, heavy footsteps could be heard ascending the stairs.

They came, they sat, they ate. Little was said, as they were all hungry. No one thanked her for cooking and she didn’t really take offense, as they never did. Somewhere in her subconscious, though, she wished they would - just once.

She started the conversation, but he didn’t want to hear any of it. Her brother didn’t say anything. She’d mention one thing or another that needed to be done or needed to change and her father would have none of it. Voices raised, her heart rose into her throat and her cheeks grew hot. Her brother ate faster, so to escape from the feud that was sure to erupt.

But she wasn’t a fan of conflict or confrontation, so she didn’t let it get that far. Her brother wolfed down his food, nonetheless, washed his plate off in the sink and retreated back into his room on the floor above. Her father did the same, descending the stars back into his office to return to the light of his computer screen, as she was sure her brother was doing in his room above. As was always the case – she was left in the middle.
I Don’t Think I’d Be That Sad If He Died
Kaili Morris

Sometimes I forget to feed my fish
it doesn’t mean I don’t love her

At least she doesn’t threaten to swallow a bottle
of pills because I haven’t bent down to say hi
in a while

My father doesn’t get
that phones work both ways

Until it’s 2am
the vodka’s gone
the liquor store is closed
and I’m being a bad daughter

Sometimes I forget to feed my fish
it doesn’t mean I’ve forgotten about him

But I wish I could if he ever threatens to hit me
because I called him racist

Sometimes I forget to feed my fish
but most days I think I love her more than him
INT. STOP & SHOP SUPERMARKET - DELI SECTION - DAY

SHARON (48) waits in line at the deli counter. She is a Long Island suburbanite and a stay-at-home mom whose life is as bland as her Sketchers. Not that she minds. Sharon scrolls through her phone.

ON PHONE SCREEN

A “Despicable Me” minion next to a quote that reads: “The doctor said I need to eat more fruit. There’s a full serving of grapes in wine, right?”

SHARON (O.S.)

MATCH CUT TO:

ON PHONE SCREEN

A text reads: “he’s ready for u now. come in thru the back.”

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. BACK ALLEY - BACK DOOR - DAY

CHINO (26) looks down at his phone and SIGHS. He’s covered head to toe with tattoos—a reminder of his gang days. His life has been tough, so he made sure to look the part. Chino opens the door and enters.

CUT TO:

INT. STOP & SHOP SUPERMARKET - DELI SECTION - DAY

Sharon is at the front of the line.
SHARON
(on phone)
I swear to gawd, Joan only put up her Christmas lights early because I did it first--

DELI BUTCHER
Ma’am?

SHARON
(on phone)
Oh! I gotta go Debbie my order’s ready...Mhm...Buh-bye.

SHARON’S POV

A gloved hand places a slab of ham on the counter.

MATCH CUT TO:

CHINO’S POV

A tatted hand places a brick of cocaine on a table.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. THE HIDE OUT - DRUG DEN - DAY

Chino’s jaw clenches as he places the cocaine in a dufflebag. He barely finishes zippering when THUD!

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
PUT YOUR HANDS UP! DON’T MOVE!
DON’T MOVE!

Chino bolts out through the back door.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SHARON’S MINIVAN - DAY

Sharon slams her car door shut. As she buckles up she turns on the radio. The song “Trap Queen” plays.
FETTY WAP (V.O.)
“She my trap queen, let her hit the bando. We be countin’ up”--

SHARON
What in the heck is a trap queen--

BAM!

Sharon is rear-ended. She SCREECHES but her seat belt keeps her in place. Chino opens the door and unbuckles her.

CHINO
Get out the car!

SHARON
What?! Are you outta your fudgin’ mind?

CHINO
I’m not playin’ lady! OUT!

SHARON
No! I went food shopping once today and if you think I’m going again you’re dead wrong mister!

CHINO
The fuck, lady?
   (shoves her into the passenger seat)
I don’t got no time for this!

Chino takes control of the wheel and whips out the car.

SHARON
HANDS ON 9 AND 3 O’CLOCK! HAND OVER HAND MANEUVERS! AHHHHHHH!!!

EXT. SOUTHERN STATE PARKWAY - DAY

The car is stuck in Long Island traffic.
SHARON (O.S.)
Once I saw on an episode of “Sex Sent Me to the Slammer” that a tear drop tattoo means ya killed a man.

INT. SHARON’S MINIVAN - DAY

CHINO
Or a woman.

SHARON
Oh my gawd. You’re gunna kill me!
What are the neighbors gunna think?! This is like that episode of “Hostage: Do or Die”--

CHINO
Yo do you ever shut up?! I’m not gunna kill you. I’m only here ‘cuz...

(his eyes widen)
SHIT! THE FUCKIN’ COKE! I LEFT IT!

SHARON
That’s what this is about?! Drugs!
You should be ashamed of yourself young man!

CHINO
Hijo de tu puta madre! Pinche idioto!

SHARON
If you think you can just talk about me in another language like they do at the nail salon--

Chino begins to cry. For once Sharon is silent.

CHINO
You don’ get it! My lil girl. She’s dyin’ n’ I can’t pay her medical
bills on the straight path. I- I love her so much. She all I got.

Chino points to a tattoo on his arm that says: “Emilia”.

**SHARON**

(gently)
I’m so sorry. What is she sick with?

**CHINO**

Tuberculosis.

**SHARON**

Tuber--Oh my GAWD! You’ll never believe this but my husband is a Pulmonologist! A lung doctor!

**CHINO**

What?

**SHARON**

He can help Emilia! Well, if you take me home. To ask and make dinner. The ham’s gunna go bad.

**CHINO**

(sobs harder)
You--you for real lady?

**SHARON**

I’m a mom. I get it. You have to protect your child at all costs.

**CHINO**

T-thank you.

**SHARON**

So... does this make me a trap queen?
We’re Nice People