

# THE DIAMOND LINE



ISSUE 8

THE DIAMOND LINE

# Finding the Light

JANIE ELLIS  
FRONT COVER

# Leaf-Eater

MICAH STAFFORD  
BACK COVER

# Letter From the Editors

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to present the eighth edition of The Diamond Line, the University of Arkansas's undergraduate magazine. We are dedicated to supporting and uplifting the voices of the U of A's undergraduate community and publishing fantastic works of art presented by emerging young writers and artists.

For this issue, we made the decision to forego a theme. We wanted to allow submitters total creative freedom with their submitted works. Despite no plan for such a thing, a natural theme did emerge from the submitted pieces that we received this year; we felt obligated to lean into this.

Thus, our magazine became a journey, a reflection of life in all its tragic beauty—particularly focusing on grief and its many stages, pairing each stage of grief with a season to signify growth and change. Though not specifically mentioned, our magazine is a trek through the seasons, starting with summer, traveling through fall and winter, and ending in spring—the point of greatest change, but ultimately the greatest symbol of hope. We wanted our magazine to reflect not only the tragedies of grief and loss but also the light that can be found, the hope that was never lost.

Cheers, friends,

Brian Nicholson

Nicole Partlow

The Editors-in-Chief of The Diamond Line

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# Contributors

**Mac Allen:**

Mac Allen was born and raised in Northwest Arkansas and has been writing from a young age. As a child, she and her brothers spent time playing in the woods and hiking through the Arkansas hills. Her poetry is a reflection of this upbringing and deals heavily in blending natural and human attributes to weave queer narratives.

**Wyatt Backer:**

Hi, I'm Wyatt. I'm a junior and first-year English major here at the university. This is my first submission of any type to anyone other than my writing classes.

**Ryan Baker:**

Ryan Baker is a fourth-year English Creative Writing Major here at the University of Arkansas. He spends his time making music, performing theatre, as well as reading and writing comics.

**Samantha Bennington:**

Samantha Bennington is from Dallas, Texas, but is a sophomore at the University of Arkansas. She is a marketing major but has a passion for writing. This is her first poem she has ever submitted, and she hopes this will be the start of many. She also is a part of a sorority on campus, Phi Mu, where she is highly involved.

**Emma Bracken:**

Emma Bracken is a sophomore student studying English/Journalism at the University of Arkansas and a writer for Hill Magazine. In her spare time, she writes poetry to explore the nooks and crannies of her mind, and to make some sense of the bejeweled parts of life that sting to look directly at.

**India Carlson:**

India Carlson is a senior undergraduate student majoring in interdisciplinary studies, with focuses on anthropology, history, and rhetoric studies. India is a Fayetteville native, and soon-to-be fifth generation University of Arkansas alumni. India

is a creative by heart, and in her spare time enjoys reading, gardening, wandering museums, baking, working in floral design, and spending time with her family. India hopes to pursue a post-graduate education in either museum studies or English.

**Abigail Cavalier:**

My name is Abigail Cavalier. I am a freshman majoring in architecture with a minor in sustainability. I have been drawing and painting for as long as I can remember. Art is my passion, my hobby, my joy, and a piece of myself.

**Taya Coffman:**

I am a transfer student who is very passionate about abstract painting through acrylics. I love to try new forms of art methods and I have found that I also enjoy using charcoal. I am eager to grow and find new ways to express my creativity in my artwork.

**Lily Bea Dillinger:**

Lily Bea Dillinger is from Perryville, Arkansas and is a senior pursuing her Bachelors in English Creative Writing. She has had a passion for writing since childhood. When not writing, she can often be found engaging in other artistic hobbies such as painting, thrifting, listening to music, and enjoying nature. She plans to pursue a M.F.A. in Creative Writing with the goal of furthering her future as an aspiring writer.

**Janie Ellis:**

Janie Ellis, a multidisciplinary artist from Broken Arrow, OK, is attending the University of Arkansas to pursue an art career. Janie's work is connected to aspects of psychology and experiences of her life and others. She is inspired by the power art has to connect to people and evoke emotions.

**India B. Hampton:**

I am an undergraduate at the University of Arkansas majoring in English, journalism, and African and African American studies and minoring in political science. I am a barista by trade and spend my free time racing against library book return dates.

**Michael Kiele:**

The amazing textures and organic shapes in the natural world have a profound influence in my artistic expression. Having worked closely in habitat restoration, my attempt is to bring attention to the beautiful and precious plants and animals we might overlook.

**Wes Koch:**

Wes Koch is a history-major from Fayetteville Arkansas. He combines his love for history and science fiction/fantasy to create impactful, entertaining, and often horrific stories.

**Jasmine Hsueh-Ting Lee:**

Jasmine Hsueh-Ting Lee is a third-year student at the University of Arkansas pursuing a major in English/Creative Writing and a minor in Journalism. She was a Managing Editor for Issues 5 and 7 of The Diamond Line. Issue 8 will house her second and third publications with the magazine. If she's not writing, she's probably thinking about writing.

**Jason Marecki:**

Jason Marecki is a sophomore majoring in English Education at the University of Arkansas. He enjoys hammocking and co-hosting a radio show on KXUA with his friends.

**Evan Meyers:**

Evan Meyers is a passionate photographer who fell in love with photography in their hometown of Hot Springs, Arkansas. Beginning with digital photography, they later ventured into the captivating world of film. For digital photography, Evan shoots with a Canon R6, and for analog photography, his main camera is a Pentax K1000. Beyond their art, Evan is dedicated to studying Computer Science

where he hopes to one day become a software developer.

**Emma Ming:**

Emma Ming is an amateur photographer based in Fayetteville, Arkansas. She takes inspiration for her work based on landscapes and animals. Her work is centered around the places we live, the things we interact with, and the natural world. Her work has never been published.

**Anna R:**

Anna is a sophomore at the University of Arkansas, working towards a degree in English rhetoric. They have always been interested in reading and analyzing poetry, but she did not start seriously writing until she enrolled in a creative writing course this last semester. As a queer person, Anna often draws inspiration from their relationship with gender and sexuality. However, she also frequently writes about the AFAB experience, religious trauma, and battling mental illness.

**Micah Stafford:**

Just think of something, anything: I'm an apple-picker who moonlights as a mime, I dance in cold showers, Paul Eluard is my great half-uncle, I was raised by a Corsican nun named Belinda... anything you want, that's me.

**Emma Zenthoefner:**

Emma Zenthoefner is a 19-year-old Oklahoman writer aspiring to become the next great fiction novelist. After taking a creative writing class in high school and college, she has written several short stories and is currently working on finishing her first novel. She has been writing since she was a child, even jotting down stories in the back of old elementary school notebooks. She has never been published before.

# Staff

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**C O L O P H O N**

The Diamond Line Literary Magazine has been typeset and designed using Adobe InDesign 2023. Work titles are typed in 50-point Times New Roman. Author names, headers, and page numbers are typed in League Gothic with various point sizes. Any other text is written in 12-point Times New Roman. Nicole Partlow constructed all clipart using Adobe Illustrator's AI generating prompts, which were then modified to the Print Production Team's style.

**A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S**

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The University of Arkansas Department of English  
The University of Arkansas Program in Creative Writing and Translation  
Rory Sims

# *kenting, 2018*

JASMINE HSUEH-TING LEE

it's hot today, too hot. for some reason your  
mother really wanted to stop at the beach.  
probably to take too many pictures and put  
sand into a tiny little bottle as a souvenir,  
even though this is the land that looked after  
her years and years ago. the ocean calls to you.

you leave your shoes in the car (you'll beat  
the sand out from between your toes later.)  
the first step down is scalding, and you  
delicately hop down to the shoreline until  
your feet adjust to the heat. the voices fade  
out as you approach the water, until all you  
can hear is a muted hum behind. the sun  
is bright, forcing your eyes into a squint as  
the ocean reflects its light back to you. all you  
can see is water, water, water, until it blends  
into the horizon beyond.

the ocean continues calling.  
you can't make out its words,  
but you listen anyways.

hush. hush. hush.

all of a sudden the world is big, too big.  
you feel the waves lapping at your feet and  
imagine your mother standing where you are,  
tossing shells into the waves and holding  
her hair behind her face. she is young again,  
freckled and tan, ignoring her parents' calls  
to come home. you wonder if she was happier,  
lighter, purer of heart than you are now. you  
wonder what life she would have lived if  
you were not her daughter and she was not your mother.

she is a ways from you now, knee-deep in  
the water, bent over at the hip, reaching  
for some shell she can't see but knows is there.

you call for her and you think she doesn't  
hear you, but when she sees you and stands up  
her smile is the exact same as yours.



# Blossom of the Saint

EVAN MEYERS

# A Treatise on the American Cockroach

JASON MARECKI

I am terrified of cockroaches.

One crawled onto my foot and I kicked him across the room. I spent hours tearing apart everything to find him but he was nowhere to be seen. They disgust me so much I can't bring myself to kill them. I can't even approach them without spawning a pit in my stomach that I seem

to spiral into. One was crawling on my ceiling as I lay in my bed and I could not move. I was paralyzed and could do nothing to change it.

They infest filth and bring it with them wherever their disgusting hairy legs decide they want to go. Reading *The Metamorphosis* was hard for me. The thought of becoming one myself made me want to vomit. Maybe vomiting would have made me more like them though. More filthy. I hate them and am terrified of them.

I tore my room apart multiple times. I could not deal with not knowing where he was. I don't exactly know what I would've done if I'd found him. Maybe I would've killed him. Maybe I would've just stood there and watched him dirty my room. I left the room and refused to sleep in it. I could not bring myself to willingly stay in a room with this intruder. An intruder that could find its way onto my sleeping body uninvited.

I don't hate most bugs. Bees are diligent workers. Butterflies are beautiful and delicate. Spiders are artists with their webs. The cockroach is the one with unfettered access to my hatred and scorn. After speaking with my mother about the unwanted presence in my room she laughed in my face. To her it was hilarious that I was unwilling to sleep and let my guard down to this thing. To her I was acting childish. It was not until my brother found him and crushed him within my doorway on his way to the bathroom did I return.

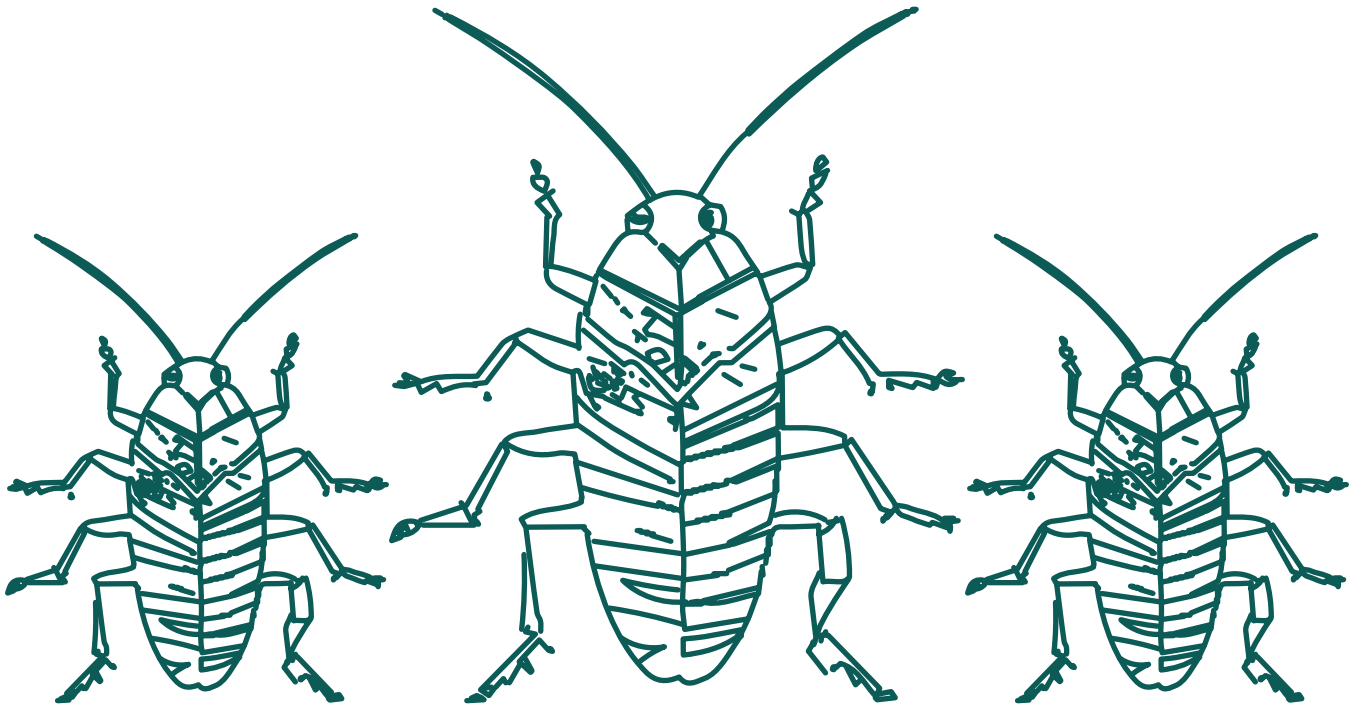
Even then my feet felt unwashed. It felt as though someone had tainted me never to be clean again. My headphone cable brushed the top of my foot and I nearly screamed. Even my baggy sweatpants felt foreign to me. I could not walk anywhere within my house without feeling like a new pursuer had given chase.

Sometimes I get the feeling it's personal for the cockroaches. They can sense my fear and disgust and use it to torment me. They stalk me and wait for my most vulnerable moment. When I'm in bed staring at my ceiling or groggily putting on my shoes in the morning or listening to records in my room.

I hate their crunch too. The way they just sort of splat is infuriating to me. Crunching

down and splattering their innards all over whatever you just smashed on top of them. Why do they get to have the last laugh in their death? They get your carpet or shoe all dirty and are scattered into pieces for you to collect. Their existence mocks me. Most of us will fade away and die but the cockroach gets to go out in a blaze of glory. It gets to be smashed and have everything on the inside get all over everything on the outside. I hate cockroaches.

Every little feeling on the hairs of my feet feels like one of them crawling along it. I kicked my foot out as though a doctor was testing my reflexes. In hindsight it was a stupid idea but it was all I knew. Get the thing as far away from me as possible. It didn't matter if he were to crawl into my closet or under my bed right then all I needed was for him to get off of me. I wanted him so far away from me and not directly on me. I hated that he was on me. I hated that he was in my room. I could not stand that he had decided to be anywhere near me. I wanted him to apologize for all the trouble he's caused and get up and walk right out the front door. I wanted him to be gone.





# Flushed Face

JANIE ELLIS

# are you hungry baby

ANNA R.

I need to be undressed,  
unzipped,  
unraveled,  
undone.  
my body's at your alter.  
strip back my skin,  
eat me up—  
love me down to my marrow.  
please pick and pull me apart,  
drag your teeth across my chest,  
hone in honey,  
have at my heart—  
it was always yours to begin with.  
how righteous this religion;  
I submit to your will.  
this my body,  
I gladly give it up to you.





TAYA COFFMAN

whispers of the soul



# Grief

WYATT BACKER

My grandparents were killed by ailments heretofore unstoppable by the collective human consciousness.

1a. My grandma had ALS. The electricity in her body was torn from her. The ability to do--to act--was torn from her.

1b. My grandpa had cancer of the pancreas. It's treatable if you catch it early. You don't. Per the advice of doctors and family, he used radiation to extend his life by a few months and die in pain.

2a. When my grandma died, I went outside to shoot free throws. She had been dying for so long. I was maybe 9 years old. Finality doesn't exist when you're 9. I resumed the quotidian.

2b. I don't remember what I did when my grandpa died.

3a. My grandma's funeral was the first time I saw my Dad cry. I think that is what grief is, and what finality is. Finality is when Dad cries. A storm threatened my grandma's burial. While we waited for it to pass, I picked up a rock outside the church where we sang to her, thinking it could be something sentimental. I lost the rock on the way home.

3b. My Dad cried at my grandpa's funeral. Hypothesis confirmed. I was something like 13, and a pallbearer. It's much lighter than you'd think. No rocks to pick up this time. I think everyone was wondering if they were next.

1c. In the basement of a church in Clarksville, Iowa, the Backers and the Hennings would get together to play Backer Bingo. There were more Hennings in attendance, but Backer Bingo sounded better. Grandma and Grandpa were still alive. The fluorescent lights crushed me. There was glittery tile that was at one point cream colored and was at present rotten cream-colored. The game chugged along, and the prize for this round was a trucker hat with the local Lions club logo. I think everyone was wondering if they were next.

# We were shooting cans with Grandpa

WYATT BACKER

Every now and again we'd head up to Iowa, the whole family would, up to Grandpa's place on the farm. Wasn't his farm, though

Grandma had been dead a couple of years, and Grandpa moved in with a friend quickly after the fact. That small house was too cramped, what with the memories and all that

I'd never shot a gun before, neither had my sister though three years my senior

Grandpa took us out to the pasture and set us up a group of cans on a stump some twenty yards away – Diet Mountain Dew

It was his favorite, and the empty cans always outnumbered the full.

We shot a little .22 rifle, perfect for my still developing frame and my very cautious parents.

Now I couldn't hit the ground beneath my feet, and the Iowa wind proved better at knocking the cans over than me. The punishment for my less-than-novice marksmanship was to go set em back up

I don't know why, maybe my sister was trigger happy, or maybe both her and my Grandpa just forgot about me, but my sister sent a round at the cans while I was bent over beneath the stump.

Luckily for me, she was dead on, and hit the top of the can-pyramid, missing me by a couple of feet.

We decided to stop for the day, and we didn't tell our parents about the incident, though Grandpa was proud of my sister's aim.

He died a couple of years later, and that was that.

I haven't been shooting since.

Not on account of fear stemming from that event or any kind of principle against owning firearms. We just decided it would be best that I don't own one myself.

I do think about the incident sometimes, memories conjured maybe by seeing a twelve pack of diet mountain dew or an old picture of Grandpa. It really does sound like the movies.

There's a zip before the bang, even from just 20 yards out, but there wasn't a clang when it hit. Just kinda went right through, and a can gently fell on my head.

I felt no shock, or excitement, or terror-

It was just unusual

# Swinging into Grief

LILY BEA DILLINGER

If someone had told me that it was just another day  
Another day in the scorching heat of Arkansas summer,  
I would have believed them.  
Or at least I would have wanted to.

Everyone's all-black attire  
And the flowers flooding every room  
Could have fooled me.  
Or at least I would have forced such foolery.

I would have told myself it was mere chance  
That we all wore the same color of night.  
I would have gone as far as to think it was Mother's Day.  
That mama was still here  
And loved ones had simply showered her with too much spring.

If I could pretend with foolishness, then I didn't have to contend with fear.

I sat on the swing of Granny Tolley's front porch  
With eyes nearly swollen shut, but not so much  
That I couldn't stare senselessly into the dead distance.

I sat on that porch swing.

Aimlessly pushing forth with my toes.

Aimlessly leaning back on my heels.

I repeated this motion.  
Just the same as the repeated motion  
Of the screen door slamming

With every casserole

With every condolence

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That wafted into the household.

How many more pats on the hand?

How many *I loved your mother very much?*

How much more could I take?

I wanted to run away.  
I wanted the fresh soil of mama's grave

To become embedded 'neath my nails

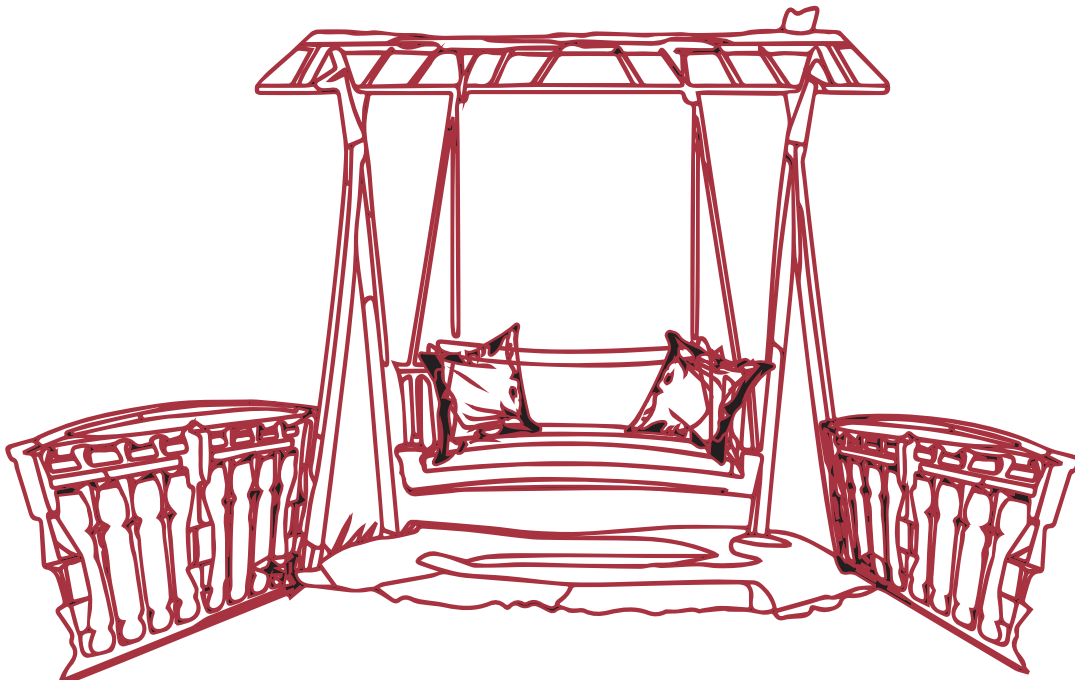
To become confined in my cuticles

As I clawed my way to her corpse  
So that she could scoop me up

And I could lean in

And I could lament

into her bosom.



# Grave Digger

WES KOCH

John Bucklim could hardly hear the radio over the sound of his creaking van. It didn't help that all six windows were down - broken AC - but John loved his ride anyway. As he struggled up the hill and paraded his way down the school parking lot, he saw the familiar smirks of the wealthier kids at school. These kids inherited their cars from their parents; they had working AC and loud stereo systems, but John was never jealous. Truly, John loved his van in a way only a working man could because he bought it all by himself.

"I've been working since fourteen, actually." When John spoke, it was usually in his defense, never for anything else. "Yep, saved for two years and bought Old Dusty." He slapped the hood of his van in front of some girl, soaking in the irony as dust exploded from the slap, "Hard work, *manual work.*"

Despite his van, John never had trouble finding girlfriends and quickly moving on to the next. *Sometimes, wheels are all it takes, any wheels.* John would talk about the nature of his work often but not about what he did. He wasn't ashamed to be a grave digger, but he found dates unsuccessful if he ever got on the subject of his work. The girls wouldn't run screaming, but he rarely took them out again - they became distant.

"Right now, I'm more or less unemployed. The busy season is during Christmas -" he'd say.

"I just don't like to think of that stuff in...that

way." A girl named Diane once told him.

"Think about what, *what way?*"

"Death. Y'know, when someone dies it - it means something for a long time. When I saw my mom buried, then and only then did I fully accept it. It meant something to me. But to you - it's just a job, it's math. You build their eternal home. But to you, it's just another hole out of hundreds"

John didn't know how to respond. It was the only time someone had gotten close to expressing what was "wrong" with his job. He conceded, "I suppose I just don't think about things the same way you do. I mean - all my folks are still alive. And, y'know, there's a job to do and a man to do it, what's wrong with that?"

"I guess you're right. Let's just talk about something else."

John was a lone wolf. He found people interesting, but that was about it. That's why John did what he did. Working overnights in a graveyard, he never had to see a single soul. He could be alone, just him and his work. And he liked it like that.

Digging was demanding work. In the movies, graves are dug with one shovel and an hour. In Bucklim's world, digging was all-encompassing and as complicated as rocket science. His spade, pickaxe, and rock bar were simple tools that required real skill and experience. He was good at

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his job and absolutely obsessed with it.

When High School graduation finally came around, he slept through it. He had work that night. Fitting, considering he slept through most of school and just barely passed - the school board agreed to give him 'extra credit' earned through grave digging. Nobody questioned it.

When he told the school's resource officer and his supervisor that he'd graduate high school, they both had the same response, that phrase about, "Out of the frying pan, and into the fryer." John thought it was a funny phrase, but it grew on him like a vine. His life was full of odd coincidences. Anytime something happened, that phrase would blaze in his mind. *Out of the frying pan. Into the fryer.* He still wasn't one hundred percent sure what it meant. Not yet, at least.

He was now nineteen, and the sound of sticking a shovel into dirt serenaded him. One never gets used to hearing roots snap under a shovel. Those roots were old, ancient even. So old that their very being expressed some purpose. They connected to an unknown tree that was even older than the root, and every time Bucklim would strain his shovel against it and finally hear it snap, it felt like murder.

Sweat emanated from him. He was used to being exhausted, sore, out of breath, blistered, worn down to the bone, lonely, creaking, and silent. But perhaps most tellingly, he was used to being dirty. One of the first nights he worked after graduating, he was six feet down, padding out the bottom of another hole. For the past seven hours, he'd been manning around in the dirt like a mole, or a kitten abandoned in the dumpster. The deeper he dug, the more thoughtless he became, eventually only acting on two instincts: primal animal instinct and the instinct to dig. All along this hole, there were roots to be kill and heavy rocks to lift. His hands were cracked, bloody, and sore.

For the past seven hours, he was utterly alone. Not

even a squirrel dared to bother John while he was at a grave. There was no rustle on the ground nor a whisper in the wind, and the half-moon barely allowed vision of anything past the rolling hills of the graveyard. The only thing resembling life other than himself was a single gas lamp that John had stuck in the side of the grave. Bucklim found himself staring at it when he wasn't paying attention.

In the hour right before dawn, Bucklim heard a footstep on a dandelion. He continued to dig anyway. By the time he put another load of dirt in his shovel, whoever was there - was gone. Bucklim stepped up on some rocks he'd propped up for an easy escape and allowed his eyes to peer out of the top of the hole. He scanned the area but still couldn't see much. Catching himself staring at the lamp light that swung listlessly in his hand, casting orange shadows on the gravestones. He shook his head and kept packing the dirt tight... Suddenly,

SCREEEECH

The feverish drumming of a car, followed by a screeching of tires, and drunk frat boys yelling, made Bucklim jump out of his skin. He fell backwards. In the dim dawning of sunlight, John saw it. The pile of dirt that he'd been building to the side of the grave began to lean, and lean, until eventually John felt dirt spray his face as the mound collapsed back into its hole.

"NOOO!" Bucklim screamed and coughed, dirt had caked into his mouth. Layer after layer, the dirt never seemed to stop. Soon, it was up to his hip before it sizzled to a calm silence. Hours and hours of good, hard work - wasted. The falling dirt came to a trickle. He let out a gasp of air and a slight laugh. For a moment, Bucklim was worried he'd be buried alive.

*Mr. Randall is going to kill me for this. Or at least cut my pay.* He thought bitterly. And as God often does, He added insult to injury. Bucklim could

smell a storm brewing.

Coming home wet and exhausted, Bucklim went up to his room - avoiding his mother - who was already almost done with a pot of coffee and a pack of cigarettes. John stomped upstairs, slammed open his door, and kicked the first thing he could see. "God... damn," he'd nearly broken his toe on his bed frame. In a fit, John attempted to lift his mattress and fling it across the room - not caring if anything broke. However, as soon as he leaned over, exhaustion took hold of him. John collapsed on the bed until the next night.

On his next shift, Mr. Randall didn't say anything. Wearing his usual scowl underneath a bright red beanie, he had a white bushy eyebrow raised out of disgust - but that was normal. Mr. Randall sat on his bench in his shack every day at the beginning of John's shifts but was gone by the time he picked up a shovel - leaving Old Harison (a defunct scarecrow) behind. They rarely spoke to one another, but today, Mr. Randall and Old Harison had their eyes on John. It unnerved him.

John put on his gloves, grabbed a shovel, looked at the dig plan, then looked back up at Mr. Randall. The dig plan is a diagram of places ordered to be dug on a dirty sheet of paper. Unsurprisingly, the hole he'd spent eight hours on yesterday still had a "TBD" next to it, with an added note that said "NYC" - Not Yet Completed. But, in a stroke of luck, there were no other holes marked to dig today. *Half a hole... that's it?*

He looked back at his supervisor questioningly. The old, crusty, and wrinkled man nodded his greasy head slightly and shrugged, "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth..." he said with a moist grin. Another one of those funny little phrases John never really got, but he was grateful all the same.

He finished the second half of the hole rather quickly; the dirt was already moved around, making his job twice as easy. It was a good day. After he finished up around two in the morning, he thought about clocking out. *And what, get paid less?* No. It was probably better to take it easy for the next few hours.

John toiled at planning out another hole to dig, something he admittedly knew very little about. Setting yardsticks about, marking down the local fauna, before eventually giving up and sitting in the grave keeper's shed. There was no electricity here, so indoors, it was pitch black save for a foggy window. The place only had a few splintering stools and the sound of rats scurrying about. From the window, John looked at the graveyard caught in a ghastly white light. Every pillar of marble was spaced so perfectly as to seem endless, inhuman.

Then, the sound of the thumping of a truck engine and the howling of drunk boys steadily approached. Bucklim stood upright and started to run towards the sound of the truck. *But what can I do besides get myself jumped or ran over? Those drunk idiots are willing to do anything if they think it's fun. Oh, who am I kidding? They could kill me... there's already a grave right there!*

He couldn't let them destroy his work again, but he paralyzed in fear. For the first time in his life, he felt the presence of the graveyard, the eeriness in its uniformity, and the heavy abyss that surrounded every step. John came to an epiphany: Fear works both ways. He ran back into the shack to look for something to use. There was a myriad of shovels, as well as rakes, chainsaws, and sheets of metal. Perhaps the most obvious thing to use would be Old Harrison. He was only some scarecrow, but he was decrypted and mishappened. Besides, it almost felt sacrilegious to move him from his spot in the corner of the shack. So, John devised a plan.

In the meanwhile, there were three college-aged boys who'd recently been on innocent drunken benders in their hometown. Both today and yesterday, they found mounds of dirt in the graveyard, and they knocked it over. They all knew it was idiotic, or at least Josh and Tyler did, but it was fun - stupid fun. It was the kind of thing that was perfect for a bunch of drunk ex-high school, and current real-world nobodies.

"Alriiight, so I'll kill the headlights and -" Kyle swerved off the road a little bit, causing the whole car to shake, but then he corrected himself. "Woah-hoh! A little turbulence on the ol' Kyle express!" Tyler rolled his eyes; Josh shook his head. The truck came to a lurching stop. Kyle turned off the truck's blaring lights.

"Try not to piss your jeans out there today, boys!" Kyle unlocked the door and winked at Tyler.

"What- dude. I didn't even-" Tyler stammered, but Josh grabbed his arm and muttered something, "C'mon man, let's just go."

The two started pushing in wooden planks under a pile of dirt and haphazardly tied bungee cords around one side. The dirt was cold and hard. It wasn't going as fast as yesterday, so for a few seconds, the only noise was the two of them grunting and kicking the dirt.

*BANG BANG!* Two loud noises from deep within the darkness of the graveyard sent both Tyler and Josh flying back. Without a word or look between them, they started for the truck. Kyle looked confused. "What took you guys so long?"

"Just shut up. Let's go," Tyler said.

"Waaiiit. Hold on, you didn't even tie me to the boards," he said, but the two were scrambling in their seats and begging Kyle to put his foot on the

gas. "No. Why would I drive all the way out here just to-" *BANG BANG!* That noise again followed by an insane scream and howling laughter. "Jesus-!" Kyle slammed his foot on the gas and rode up the road. They could still hear cackling. "Oh god, oh shit, oh god, oh Christ," Josh muttered to himself over and over.

And then the truck swerved off the road again. This time, the front tires slid straight into a ditch. *Out of the frying pan, into the fryer.* Josh's head cracked the windshield down the middle. Tyler's body was contorted into the floorboard of the backseat of the truck.

When Josh woke up, blood trickling down his face, it was to the sound of Kyle desperately trying to back the car out of the ditch. It would move back a few feet when he pressed the gas, but as soon as he let off it would sink back in. Revving, then sinking, revving, then sinking. "Almost... there..." Kyle slurred. He didn't seem to be injured; Josh was still getting to make sense of what was happening around him. Revving... revving... escape! They made it out of the ditch. "Let's get to the hospital." Josh pleaded, but Kyle remained silent. The truck stopped.

"Kyle- What?"

Kyle was frozen. Not daring to look forward, Josh studied the primal death etched into his friend's face. Every muscle was still. His breathing was non-existent - completely silent. "Kyle... What's wrong?" he shook his friend, but Kyle just shook his head and said, "There's something... on the windshield." For the first time, Josh looked forward. In blood, smeared across the windshield, were the words: *THE DEAD SHALL NOT BE DISTURBED.* His heart sank when he saw that the message was written inside of the truck. Josh frantically looked behind him in the backseat, "Tyler are you-" A blood stain on the floorboard was all that remained of him. They heard cackling once again, this time, Kyle sped away.



Bucklim was laughing. He'd never felt so good in his life. The burden he was carrying made it hard to breathe and laugh at the same time - he felt lightheaded and delusional. "HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA! HA HA - HAAAAH!" *Thud.*

John fell six feet into the grave he'd just protected. It hurt like hell - a broken rib - but he felt too good to stop laughing. Giggling and rolling around in the dirt, he felt too good. When John heard the police sirens come and go a few minutes later, he knew he was successful. Those kids would not be coming back anytime soon. *Especially this asshole.* Tyler's corpse lay bruised and battered next to John in his grave.

After John had calmed down a little, he crawled out of his grave. Using his tools, he managed to get Tyler out as well and laid his body down a few feet from the hole. Stumbling back to the bench, John wiped the tears and sweat from his face and caught his breath. Still, he'd randomly get a short burst of pure joy and start giggling for a few seconds, but by the time he sat down, he sighed and felt at peace. *That was a lot of fun.* He thought. *Man, I miss messing with people. I just miss people, I guess.* Another fit started to bubble up, but he calmed himself down. Bucklim popped his knuckles one at a time by pulling on his fingers. His inner voice was now silent, and he got to bask in the emptiness of a full graveyard. It was almost quitting time, John suspected, but his watch said 4:30 a.m., so not quite yet.

*I want to do that again.* The thought crept up like a ghoul.

An idea occurred. Bucklim swung open the door to the shack and looked around. There he is! John picked up Old Harrison by its armpits. He was a creepy-looking thing, to be sure. He brought the doll-man out into the moonlight. *I can use him to*

*jump in front of the car... that way, I don't risk my life next time.*

"Hey, buddy? How're you holdin' up?" he asked Old Harrison, "Oh, don't be so shy... Don't feel like talkin' eh?" John rolled Harrison over with his foot. The scarecrow was so beaten up that it hardly looked like it was supposed to be human-shaped.

Bucklim shuffled through the rakes and shovels, and he grabbed a broken rake and popped off the head, leaving just the stick. He broke the stick and half. "We got you some legs!" John grinned at Old Harrison. After he stuck the rods into his torso, he already looked better. John half expected the scarecrow to spring to life, but he still didn't look real enough for John. *Hm. What else can I add?* John rummaged through the rusty tools unsuccessfully. *I need arms, hair... eyes...* Another great idea struck Bucklim as his eyes fell on Tyler's body.



# Spike

WYATT BACKER

Spike was a terrier, that's about all we ever knew.

Mom picked him up at a Lowe's parking lot, from an aloof girl trying to free him from the abuse of her household.

He was mangy and matted and he had fucked up teeth and he was ugly and we loved him. We got him cleaned up quick.

He was a sensitive fella, moved real slow and didn't do too well when no one was in the house with him. He was grey, always looked old but we had no way of knowing how old he really was. One vet said six, one said eight, one didn't even bother to try.

We got Rosie after about five years with Spike. Rosie was a dorkie (a dachshund-yorkie mix) quite full of fire—she'd fuck with the old man any chance she could get.

She particularly loved clamping onto his ears and hanging off them when he tried to get away.

To us, it was cruel. But probably more endearing than we could ever know. Truly, they got along great, and they spent their time sleeping, playing, and hoarding toys and trash in the nook behind the couch.

We put Spike down a few years after. I didn't go with. I greeted my family's car when they pulled back into the drive without him. I remember the light-polluted night sky. And the pity.

He's in a little doggy urn on a shelf next to a clay outline of his paw print and his collar – white and red, stitched like a baseball. Rosie lost some fire for a while.

We gave her his collar; she kept it with her. We eventually put it back up on the shelf.

Old Rosie's still with us some seven years later, much subdued as time has passed.

Now her teeth are fucked up, and there's a new dog to tug at her ears. She probably deserves it.

And Spike's collar disappeared for a while. No one knew what happened as nothing else was missing, and we turned the place upside down to find it. And, eventually, we did.

It was tucked up in a nook behind the couch.

# roadkill

ANNA R.

bright lights flashing  
show mangled reflections looking back at me.  
i try to move,  
but i can't look away.  
it's getting hard to breathe.  
i've seen what happens;  
jacked up tires have no mercy.  
i know there is no stopping it—

†††

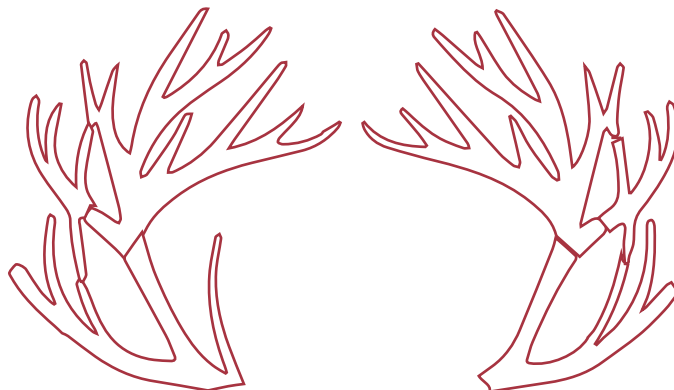
but if I'm good,  
and i don't get blood on your seats,  
maybe you'll take me as a trophy,  
mount my mutilated body.  
i'll escape hell's highway,  
and you can brag to your friends.

please!

i promise to be the prettiest shrine in your living room.

†††

but your music's blasting,  
and you can't see.  
rock and roll drowns out my screams.  
so i'll stay splattered on the pavement,  
sticky and red,  
and watch the cars try not to hit me,  
now that i'm dead.



*tolerated*

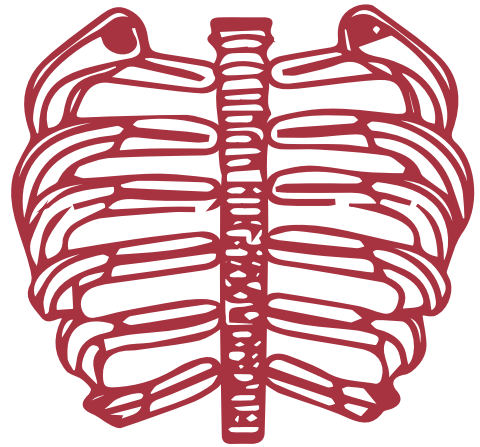
JASMINE HSUEH-TING LEE

we do this every morning. you  
roll out of your side of your bed  
somewhere around 7 and stumble  
to the bathroom. the mattress rocks  
a little when you rise. a cloud of steam  
wraps around you when you return (i  
dream of doing the same) and you come  
back to bed. your body is damp, heavy,  
and for some reason i reach for you.  
you do not acknowledge my presence.

i carved your name into my right floating  
rib the first night i met you. my head is  
starting to sprout hairs the same color  
as yours. there are twin marks on my hips  
where your hands always rest. what else  
do i mean to you other than this side  
of the bed that's not even mine?

i know our routine by now. you climb back out  
of your bed, out of your room, into the kitchen  
wordlessly. all that remains of you with me is  
your scent, faint of sandalwood and beer. i  
close my eyes again, breathe in deep, and  
pretend that i am anything more to you.

you will remember i exist after your morning  
coffee. you'll come back in, hover over my body,  
hesitate, and simply just whisper good morning.  
then you'll leave. once again, i am no longer a  
person, but a crossed-off item on your to-do list.  
once again, i pretend that is what i want to be.



INDIA B. HAMPTON



March

# The Angel in The Hallway

INDIA CARLSON

February 29th, 2016

I'm standing in a hallway right outside the first floor chapel in Washington Regional Hospital. My arms are folded across my chest with each hand tucked under an armpit securely, yet somehow also squirming – I'm not sure why this is reassuring, maybe because it feels somewhat like a hug? It feels secure? The hallway is cold, and this helps a little? I don't know. The fluorescent lighting overhead feels overwhelming, almost blinding, and everything is so...white. So sterile. There is no one in the hallway, but I can hear faint chatter from people in the emergency room waiting room down the hall and around the corner. There's a slight high pitched noise in my left ear that won't go away. At the end of the hall, there is a small end table in the corner with a large grey vase filled with plastic greenery inside, the only decoration and visible color.

My back is firmly planted against the wall. My heart is racing. I look down at myself and feel a little embarrassed. I am wearing my mom's red Smashing Pumpkin's t-shirt that she procured in the 90s, when she was about 17 years old. It has a green fortune teller lady on the front, surrounded by an oval-shaped blue backdrop. The logo is faded in all the right places, that perfect vintage concert tee look. She passed it onto me when I turned 17. It has that soft, worn-in-yet-thick, cozy feel to it that I love. It's one of my go-to shirts when I need something to throw on or something comforting to wear. I look down at my jeans, and they aren't clean. There's faded dirt marks on the knees. My shoes are essentially

house shoes, and they actually broke while running across the hospital parking lot. The sole on my left foot separated from the top of the shoe, and while my foot is still covered, the sole now awkwardly slaps the hospital tile when I walk, so that is embarrassing. My hair is tangled. I have smudged eyeliner under my eyes from the night before and from all the crying I had done that day. I was in such a rush; I wasn't even wearing a bra. It was mid-afternoon, but I hadn't had a chance to shower that day. We were deep cleaning the house, and I was in charge of bathrooms. I planned on showering after I was done handling bleach and cleaning toilets, and why shower twice? I had no idea that this would happen, that I would need to just grab whatever clothes I could, that I wouldn't have time to shower, that I would end up here, in the hospital hallway, fidgety and unsure with what to do with myself.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, and I jolt at the sensation. It was a text from one of my Aunts:

*Any updates?? Your mom isn't responding to me...hang in there...*

There weren't any updates. I hated to be the one to say it; I didn't want to believe it, but here we were. None of this felt real. It can't be; these things don't happen in my family. Certainly not to Eden. Not smiley, sweet, innocent little Eden. I must be dreaming, right?

Another text, this one from a different Aunt:

*Are you guys at the hospital now? Are all your*

*brothers there? Kristal just told me she's with Eden. Praying so hard for a miracle. Wish we could be there.*

I didn't want to answer questions. I didn't want to do anything. I just wanted to stand there and process what I had just been through, what I just had to do. I start looking around me as if I'm looking for someone with the answers to the questions I'm being asked. Can't anyone take this from me, at least for a little bit?

Though I know the answer, I've always known the answer. Being the oldest of five children, and the only girl until right before I turned 18, when Eden joined the family, it was expected that I help a lot with the house and with my three younger brothers. Especially after Eden, the baby sister was born. She was the perfect surprise, and we couldn't imagine our family without her, but due to the 11 year age gap between Eden and the next oldest sibling (my youngest brother) - my parents were essentially new parents all over again, and my mom was on bed rest for a little while after Eden's birth. I became baseball mom, chef, acquirer of groceries, chauffeur, and maid of the house overnight. All while attending my second year of college and, taking 12 credits (I started when I was 16), and working two jobs. I was used to the expectations, the extra grind, the extra weight. This might be too heavy for me to carry, though; I could already tell.

Hot tears stream down my face, and I angrily brush them away and start pacing. I don't know what to do with myself. I don't want to go back into the chapel, though I know I shouldn't stay in the hallway for much longer.

I stop pacing suddenly, and press my back against the wall. I am so beyond tired. I allow myself to slide down the wall until I am fully sitting on the cold, hard, sterile-white floor. Normally it would have grossed me out. Hospitals in general weird me out, but I don't care. My brain feels like what a television looks like when it goes static – all you can hear is that scratchy, deafening white noise, and all you can

see are scrambled pixels, sometimes just black and white, sometimes with color. I feel like I am crawling out of my skin. I am exhausted, yet also feel like I could run one hundred laps around the perimeter of the hospital and still have energy to burn.

“Hello, what was your name again?”

I snap back to reality. Standing above me was an older man, I would guess maybe in his late 60s or early 70s, wearing green scrubs with a short white jacket over it. Prominently embroidered on the left side pocket were the words “Emergency Department Volunteer” in dark purple lettering. He had curly gray and white hair, honestly a surprising amount of thick hair for a man his age, and a tanned face with kind eyes. His hands were clasped behind his back, and he was leaning forward slightly in an attempt to get down to my level. I hadn't even heard him walk down the hallway, the first sign of life I had seen in my short time out here. He was the one who escorted my brothers and I from the busy ER waiting room to the more secluded and private chapel a while ago; I'm not sure how long it's been. Time seems mostly irrelevant right now. He was nice. I'm not sure what his role actually is, but he seems more important, knowledgeable, and involved than a normal volunteer. He was acting as a messenger between us and any news that came about Eden or from my parents. For all I know, the “volunteer” label on his jacket could be an inaccurate description of what his role actually entails.

“Oh, hi. I'm India. I'm Eden's big sister. Sorry, I can go back into the chapel...” I said nervously, my voice shaking a little. He offered me a hand to stand up.

“Oh no, you are fine! I just wanted to ask, it's easier when I know names. I like to address people by their names. India is a very pretty name, I like it. You and your siblings have some great names.”

I take his hand and stand up. I can tell he wants

## THE DIAMOND LINE

to talk to me about something.

“Thank you. Have you seen my parents? Do you know anything?” I ask.

“No, nothing new. Though I was just with them. They’re doing everything they can to help her, the fervency and love in that room from the nurses and doctors is palpable, let me tell ya. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

This was comforting to hear, somewhat at least. I don’t know what to say to him. My mind is drawing a blank on any conversational points I could bring up. This wasn’t exactly the appropriate situation to ask chit-chatty things like “how’s the weather?”

“Eden is the youngest in your family, correct? And you are the oldest?” he asked, gently smiling. His voice was deep and soft, yet comforting.

“Yes, she was born a little under a month before I turned 18. She will be 2 next month at the end of March, I’ll be 20 on May 1st. She was a miracle baby, my parents didn’t think they could have any more kids, though they had always talked about wanting another. We were all so surprised when we found out my mom was pregnant.” I am surprised at how much answer I offered his simple question. He is still standing there, hands clasped behind his back, smiling, slowly nodding, and attentively listening. I just let myself keep talking, and before I knew it, I was rambling. My mind still felt blank and scrambled, but the words came so easily to me like they were just bursting to come out of my mouth.

I went on to recount what had happened that day. It was Leap Day. We were spring cleaning. I was in charge of my room and several bathrooms in the house. I had finished the bathrooms, and I was working on my room. Door closed, music on. My two youngest brothers, my mom, and Eden were downstairs. August, the sibling right under me in age, was at high school basketball practice at Fayetteville High School. It was his senior year, and he was a star player. My dad was

at work in Bentonville. I was just about to take a quick shower.

I wandered downstairs to get a glass of water. My mom ran into me in the kitchen, and frantically asked if I had seen Eden recently. I had not. Her eyes widened and she immediately shouted, “Okay, EDEN IS MISSING. EVERYONE START LOOKING. NOW.” My heart dropped.

“What do you mean she’s missing? What’s going on? Who was watching her?” I half asked, half shouted back. No answer; she was already running to the other end of the house. I see one little brother, Canyon, run one direction. I see the other, Roman, run the opposite direction, fervently searching. I looked to my right and saw the door leading to the garage, and through the window in the door, I could see the garage door was open. Could she be out there?

I ran outside, barefoot and still wearing my pajamas. I start shouting Eden’s name, searching the yard for her mint green shirt with dragonflies on it and the tiny pigtails she had in her hair the last time I saw her. Nothing.

I started to turn to go back inside when I heard a shriek pierce the air. The shriek of my mother, the sound no mother should ever have to make. The sound no child should ever have to hear. The sound that will forever be ingrained into my memory.

I look across the backyard to the opposite end of the house, where the indoor pool room stuck out a bit into the yard. The house was older, and it had an indoor pool, an unusual quirk for a Northwest Arkansas home, a quirk that convinced my parents to choose this home in the first place. It had floor-to-ceiling windows and sliding glass doors covering the majority of three of the walls to that room, and through those giant windows, I could make out the silhouette of my mom.

Reaching into the pool.  
Taking something out.  
*No.*



I immediately knew what had happened. No. No no no. I run inside and see my mom enter the main house with Eden limp in her arms, water dripping everywhere. “CALL 911!” She shouted, her face flushed and her voice cracking. My brothers were both screaming and panicking. I didn’t stop running; I ran straight upstairs to my room, where my iPhone 4 was charging on my nightstand. I dialed 911 so quickly that I don’t even remember pushing the buttons, and flew down the carpeted stairs so fast I slid across a few, but miraculously did not fall all the way.

“911, what is your emergency?”

“Hi, um, my...daughter?...drowned and she isn’t breathing. Wait, she’s not my daughter, she’s my sister, sorry I don’t know why I said that. I don’t have any kids. I’m only 19, I’m too young for that. She’s not even 2. We live at...” and I gave our address. She asked a few clarifying questions on location, then asked what Eden’s condition was. My mom had laid Eden down on the carpet in the den, which was straight down a short hallway from the front door. She was performing CPR. I told the 911 operator this. I transferred to speaker phone, and she began to coach my mom through the proper CPR steps. I slid down to my knees, right next to Eden’s head, held the phone with my right hand, and held her tiny legs steady with my left so she wouldn’t shift around so much during the chest compressions. She was so small, and so cold. How did this happen? Was this real? My brothers were at Eden’s feet, crying and pleading with her to wake up.

“We love you, Eden.”

“Please wake up baby. I love you. Please, please.”

Mom had tears streaming down her face. She was hysterical, understandably, as any mother would be in this situation. At one point, she paused CPR because she just couldn’t keep going. I threw down the phone and continued the CPR for about 20 seconds while mom com-

posed herself. I had no tears. My mind felt still, and sharp. It was clear. I felt eerily calm. I knew exactly what needed to happen. Mom continued the CPR again.

I looked at my brothers, and thought they should not be seeing this. I said Canyon’s name, but he was mentally checked out, obviously entrenched in absolute grief and shock. He was 15. He wouldn’t even make eye contact with me. I said Roman’s name, and his brown eyes immediately locked with mine. He was more present. He looked scared. He was barely 13. I instructed him to grab Eden’s diaper bag, make sure she had a few diapers and a change of clothes in there, and to set it by the front door. He immediately stood up and ran off to complete his tasks, his shaggy blond hair bouncing a little with each step. About a minute later, he came back. I then told him to grab mom’s shoes for her, and also put those next to the front door. After that, he needed to find her phone and bring it to us. He did both of those things in no time. Finally, I told him to get his own shoes on, keep the front door open, and wait on the porch for the ambulance; they should be here any second. Shout when you see it. He did so without question; I think he was happy for an excuse to step away and help in some way.

Apparently, it was only a few minutes between me calling 911 and paramedics arriving, but it felt like at least half an hour. When paramedics arrived, I told the 911 operator that they were there and hung up. At least three paramedics that I could remember at least rushed into the house, immediately took over from my mom, and instructed us all to take a step back and give them space. They pulled out a few small machines and started hooking them up to Eden. They ripped her dragonfly shirt off; she was just in her pool-soaked diaper now.

Everything after that was a blur. All the sudden, reality crashed into me. I was hyper-aware of every sound, every smell, every sensation. My heart was pounding, and my lips and hands felt numb. I was trembling. My mouth was dry. I could smell the pool chlorine mixed with the

## THE DIAMOND LINE

citrus candle my mom had lit earlier that day. I remembered how cold, wet, and limp her body felt when I briefly gave her CPR. The carpet was soaked in pool water. The front of my shirt was soaked. My face was wet from tears, though I didn't remember when they started or realized that they had started at all. The beeping sounds from the paramedic's machines were overwhelming. The paramedics were shouting to one another and calling out each action they took. My legs gave out beneath me, and I found myself sitting sideways on the floor next to the dining table, with my legs tucked to my left side and my right elbow still on the table surface. I watched the paramedics buzz around Eden in almost slow motion. A blur of navy blue and black uniforms, latex gloves, and busy hands. One of the paramedics made eye contact with me briefly but just long enough for me to see the horror and absolute anguish in his eyes. I felt sorry for him, sorry that now he too would be traumatized from this event like the rest of us.

I looked at Eden's toys scattered throughout the den, and that is when I truly broke. The tears started falling, and they fell hard and fast. My mind started racing.

*Would she ever play with those toys again? What were we going to do? What even happened? How did she get to the pool room? Wasn't it deadbolted? It's February and the pool heater is broken; we haven't used it in months. There are two baby gates in between her and the pool room door. How did she manage that? She's barely tall enough to reach a doorknob; how did this even happen?*

They eventually loaded Eden into the back of the ambulance, still performing CPR. As soon as they were outside with Eden, I ran upstairs to the bathroom across from my room. I quickly splashed water on my face, wet my toothbrush with some toothpaste on it, and started brushing with my right hand while I undressed myself with my left. I grabbed the nearest clean underwear I could find, jeans that were crumpled on my bedroom floor, my Smashing Pumpkins

t-shirt, and house shoes simply because they were what was closest to me. I rinsed off my toothbrush and my mouth, then threw on the clothes I had gathered as quickly as my shaking hands would allow. I ran back downstairs; the boys already had their shoes on and were pacing in the living room, crying, scared, and unsure of what to do next.

I went out onto the front porch, where I was surprised to see an ambulance, two firetrucks, and several police cars littering the lawn and street in front of our house. I was told that they would be transporting Eden, accompanied by my mom, to the ER. I was told to follow them in a separate vehicle with my brothers. I really should not have been driving in the state I was in, but somehow I managed to get us there in one piece – sobbing the entire way.

When we arrived at the ER, the waiting room was surprisingly full for a Monday afternoon. I saw my dad waiting in line to check in at the front desk, and we rushed to meet him. My mom had called him to let him know what had happened, and he had left the office immediately. A nurse escorted my dad to where they had Eden and my mom, but my brothers and I were stopped. We were told we had to wait in the waiting room. We miraculously found three seats together and quietly sat there with tears streaming down our faces, hugging Eden's diaper bag and a few of her favorite stuffed animals. Everyone was staring at us. That is when the nice volunteer man found us and escorted us back to the small chapel.

And here we are.

I stopped talking, shocked that I had gone on for so long. The volunteer man was still standing there, hands clasped behind his back, patiently listening to me and slowly nodding his head. "I am so sorry; I shouldn't have gone on like that." I was embarrassed. I had never spoken so freely like that to anyone before, especially not to a stranger. My chest felt a little lighter, though, so maybe I needed it.

He placed his right hand on my left shoulder and gave a closed-mouth smile. His eyes were glistening. His hand felt comforting and reassuring.

“You are just fine. Eden has a good family. You sure love her lots. I can’t say for sure what will happen here today, but I know everyone is trying their best – you, me, the nurses, the doctors, your parents, God, and all of His angels combined. God bless you, India.” His deep voice cracked as he said this.

I return to the chapel, which was really just a small room with a pew and a few chairs lining the perimeter and several bibles scattered around the room. There was religious artwork on the walls, along with a small wooden cross. Someone had picked up August from the high school and brought him to the hospital, so all of my brothers were there, along with an uncle, aunt, a few cousins, and several leaders from our church. We all sat there in silence.

Eden would be okay. After two hours of CPR, which is unheard of, she would come back to us. Soon after, she would be transferred to Arkansas Children’s Hospital in Little Rock, where a few days later, she would get diagnosed with an anoxic brain injury. We would be told that she would be vegetative for the rest of her life. We would be given no hope. However, my dad would research any possible treatment that could help save his daughter’s brain. He would find it. About two months later, I would travel to New Orleans with my mom and Eden so she could receive hyperbaric oxygen therapy treatments. They would be wildly successful. By the end of that summer, Eden’s brain will have regrown what was lost, and she will be the first (known) person in medical history to have regrown white and gray matter in the brain. Her personality would come back in full force. They would remove her feeding tube. She would speak, eat on her own, and even remember things that happened before the accident, as well as the accident itself and being vegetative in the hospital. The following year, in the summer of 2017,

her medical study will be released to the public, and, by extension, the media. Her story will gain international recognition. Eden will help countless children around the globe receive the same treatments that saved her brain and will open the doors for a new wave of stem cell research. Eden will have some struggles with mobility and fine motor skills, but she is resilient and will have plenty of help overcoming challenges. Because of her accident happening on Leap Day, we would only have to experience the exact anniversary of her accident every four years.

But we didn’t know any of this yet. We were still waiting to hear if the CPR was even working.

I close my eyes tight, and I imagine Eden as a 10-year-old little girl playing on a playground with friends. As a 16-year-old, going on her first date. As a young adult in college. As an old woman surrounded by her posterity. I could see it. I could see her. She was beautiful. She was strong. She was smiling at me with a wise and knowing smile. She was right there in front of me, I could almost touch her. I want so much for her to be real, for her to live.

The door to the chapel swung open, and the volunteer walked in. He looked around the room until his eyes met mine. They were filled with tears. His voice cracked once again.

“They have a heartbeat. She is stable.”

Gasps and cries of joy burst throughout the room. Shortly after, my brothers and I were escorted by the volunteer to a different part of the hospital, where we waited for my dad to join us and decide our next steps. The volunteer wished us well and gently patted me on the shoulder before walking away, off to play the part of guardian angel for someone else in need. I will never forget that kind volunteer, and how he took the time to listen to a ragged young girl lost in a hospital hallway who just needed an anchor for a short while.

ABIGAIL CAVALIER



Blue Eyes

# Portrait of Fox and Hare

MAC ALLEN

## Hare

Winter has settled firmly in the woods  
drawn together huddled masses  
and the warren is dark and warm  
burrows filled to bursting with thickset  
bodies pressed tight for desperate shelter

She waits above, in snow slurry  
soaked and shivering to the bone  
watching ice melt in early morning sunlight  
dipped low on the horizon

She's spent a week underground  
in the dirt and the dark and the warm  
The cold and light are biting  
nipping like hound dogs at her heels  
The dandelions are months away  
her hunger is ravenous and desperate  
a sharp thing tugging violently at her flank

A stick snaps and she leaps  
throwing snow and dirt in sloping arcs  
peeling away through the melting slush

## Fox

she gives chase—  
she really shouldn't—

it's easy in the end

it's not the thrill of the catch  
the victory or the chase itself  
but the giving in  
the succumbing  
to the rush of blood  
the syncing of heart to feet  
mouth wet in desperation

snow and dirt fly  
she ducks low  
closing in one foot  
then another

they've done this before  
the two of them chase  
each other about these woods  
in early spring dandelions  
late autumn fennel  
summer clover and this  
the half melted snow

it's a game  
the fox's teeth to the hare's throat  
the hare's claws at the fox's belly  
and the blood spells their love  
better than the words ever could

ABIGAIL CAVALIER

# Leftover Paint



# When Lightning Strikes

EMMA ZENTHOEFER

The people of the town, deep in the desert, bustled through their typical morning - the men slaving away in the dry fields; the women corraling children of all ages. Life continued as usual, a boring, dull day under the blistering sun. Although it brought misery, the sun defined their way of life. That is, until the clouds began to form, gathering in the pale blue sky. The wind strengthened; eyes turned upwards. Before the first raindrop fell, before the first rumble of thunder shook the ground, the citizens began gathering around the temple.

Michelle, a lone mother of two, hurried to the schoolhouse to retrieve her son, who gathered with the other children outside, their curious eyes sky bound. Her daughter, who was one year too young to marry off, followed close behind. Unlike her brother, she's scared silent.

The rarity of the storm forming from the cluster of clouds above was vital to the town's survival. They believed the drops of water for their soil were blessings from gods. Normally, rain brought excitement to the children, relief to the adults, but a thunderstorm - it brought neither, for a thunderstorm meant the gods were angry, peeved by the constant pleas for rain. Their anger rumbled through the clouds, flashing light across the darkened sky. The citizens must please their gods, to spare themselves from suffering an extended drought.

Michelle and her children joined the other families at the temple, all watching fearfully as the imperative men gathered near the top, where a

long metal pole rose into the clouds. A place for their gods to channel their energy, the pole was considered the town's greatest treasure. As the men commenced their speech, the rain began. Michelle could barely hear them over the pitter-patter, though she knew their words by heart, reciting them in her head. Every thunderstorm, she heard those words. Soon, her children would also memorize those words; the words that claimed their father.

Michelle would normally have nothing to fear about the thunderstorm. After her previous sacrifice, she was immune from any more loss, her children immune from any more pain. Though, their immunity dried up with the empty riverbed, their time expired. They were just as at risk as everyone else, though Michelle believed their chances were slim. What were the odds it would once again be them?

The rain fell harder as the scrolls were brought out, already stained with the tears of both the sky and the unlucky. One of the corners was stained with blood. Michelle's daughter fiddled with her dress. Michelle took her hand to comfort her. Her son stood proud, too young to fully comprehend the direness of the situation or the suffering that would follow. He had yet to be born when his father had been stolen from him.

A name rang out over the crowd, though it was drowned out by the wind. Those in the front, those who could understand the garbled speech from the top of the temple, turned around, searching for the unlucky soul. The men repeat-

## THE DIAMOND LINE

ed the name. Thunder rumbled. Finally, a pair of eyes landed upon Michelle. Then more. Soon Michelle could hear the name chosen by the gods, selected by the raindrops upon the scrolls. It wasn't Michelle. It wasn't her daughter. It was her son.

Realizing that something was wrong, her son clung to Michelle's leg. Her daughter's hands began to shake, tears rolling down her cheeks. Not again – Michelle couldn't comprehend what was happening – Not again.

She remembered the way her husband looked when his name was called; his expression solemn but accepting. Only sixteen, she didn't know how to react. Pregnant with her son and clutching a two-year-old daughter, Michelle sobbed the entire time her love climbed the temple steps. How had he accepted his fate so effortlessly, leaving his wife and children behind, all alone? Michelle couldn't watch as her husband was strapped to the pole. As she turned her daughter's eyes away, Michelle peaked back one last time. Her last sight of her husband was him smiling, tears falling with the rain.

Lightning struck.

Michelle came back to her senses as her son was lifted and carried away from her. Her body trembled as she watched him bawl in the arms of the man dragging him to his death. He was almost halfway to the top when Michelle's heart shattered. When she lost her husband, it had cracked, but unlike then, this was unmendable.

Michelle clutched her daughter's hands, looking apologetically into her eyes before bolting after her son. Crying out his name, Michelle pushed through the crowd, people glaring at her for causing a scene. She didn't care. She must get to her son. She must save him.

The men at the base of the temple held her back, forming a barricade to block her. Screaming, she pushed against them, and, through some miracle, one of the men stumbled, creating an opening

for Michelle to slip through. She dashed up the temple stairs; her son being strapped to the pole when he saw her. Hearing him call out to her was heart wrenching, propelling Michelle forward. When she made it to him, the rain was lashing down harder than ever before, as if the gods were enjoying the show.

Michelle clawed at the ropes around her son, but, at first, they wouldn't budge. His fearful eyes stared up at her, pleading for help. Finally, Michelle tugged the rope loose from her son's waist, shoving him out of the way. He fell on his backside, tumbling down the stairs, but Michelle didn't care. All she cared about was his distance from the pole. Before her son could recover and look up at his mother, Michelle wrapped both her arms around the pole. She didn't have time to look at the shocked faces of her neighbors or the cries of her daughter below. The moment Michelle firmly grasped her hands around the pole, the gods accepted her sacrifice.

Lightning struck.





# Change

SAMANTHA BENNINGTON

**TW: Mental Health/Eating Disorder**

I hate Change.  
And not in the way everyone else does,  
No.  
Mine is deep and dark.

Change is the warden of my every day.  
Change is my ghost from the past,  
Change haunts me.  
Change is swirling around me in August,  
I want to swat it down like a fly.

My wrists are getting thinner,  
My watch slides around with every movement.  
My clothes fit different,  
It looks as if I'm swimming in them now.  
My head is all foggy,

Change torments me from its high post.  
Change picks, peels, and probes at my life.  
Change stabs and scrapes away at my happiness.  
Change is deep and dark.

My hair is falling out.  
My rings are loosening.  
I get dizzy every time I stand up.

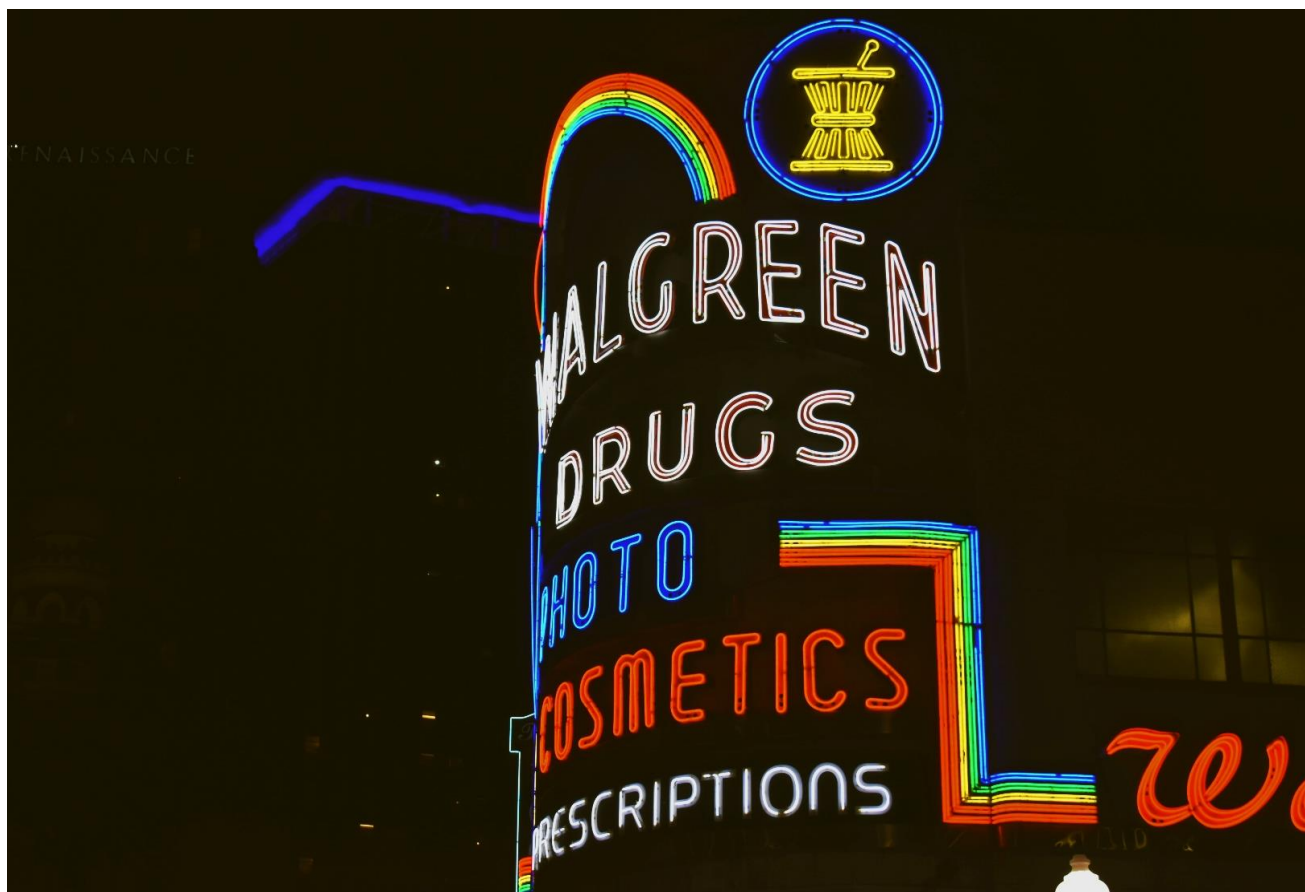
Can I just lay in bed?  
Do I really have to go?  
Change, why don't you leave me alone?

# Afterlife

EMMA BRACKEN

She is born in Elysian Fields  
between swaying flowers alongside the riverbank  
crying out because her voice is new, unmoored  
and sweet air welcomes her incivility with a sad smile.  
Days steadfast and warm  
her hair grows long  
as she is carried from arms to arms  
her body reserved for wistful sleep and adorning with flowers.  
Arms may grip her too tight  
but while the sunlight is so effervescent  
she won't notice.  
One day, she'll stumble across an old golden box  
and in it is time  
and it will devour her.  
It will wear her wrists raw with restraint  
seal her soft lips  
at every moment she cries out  
so that when the wind blows  
only silence is carried past her.  
She'll crawl through the labyrinth bruised and blue  
as time continues to mistle upon her shoulders  
drip from her eyes

until she finds herself upon the eleventh hour.  
Only then may she look up to see the asphodel  
hanging from the mouths of the death  
and know that she has always been there  
in the box which holds her down  
and plucks the awe from her calloused fingers.



# In Plain Sight

EMMA MING

# The Demon and the Human

RYAN BAKER

For some Hell is a place where the sins of life manifest in the form of oily tendrils that lock around the once-living to choke out any remaining hope. Demons dominate the role of torturer. Torture. Hell is torture.



The demon Illspur awakes at 8 in the morning to the sound of a severed head screaming rhythmically on his bedside table. Illspur's huge hand lugs over and smashes the head to a crunchy red mush of bone and brain--as is routine, the head will be fully regenerated and ready to scream again by the next morning-- Illspur sits on the edge of his bed contemplating his choices for about ten minutes. Nine months ago he quit his job as a torturer of the damned souls of Hell to start working on Earth for a human job where he 'sells large machines to people who already have large machines but maybe need more large machines'... or at least, that's how he explains it to his roommate.

He stares at his carpet. Stained. Dirty. Ill tempt. He will need to clean it before Saturday. Illspur picks up a dress shirt from the floor and puts it on, the human world does not care for the fashion trends of Hell so he dresses the part. He steps into his bathroom and avoids himself in the mirror. His face is round. His mouth long. His horns are that

of a ram with two deer ears on top his head in between the horns. Illspur puts on a smile and points two figure guns in the mirror as he tries to catch his reflection off guard. "Heyy Katie!" Illspur's voice is like a handsaw grinding and gnawing at your ears as he rehearses today's interaction with the pretty human from his office. He has a date with her on Saturday. *Talk human talk human* "This weather is crazy!" *that's good.* "I mean, does it want to be summer or winter? Amiright?" *yeah, keep it vague... now hit her with it!* "You look bangin' today!" *don't you dare say that.* Illspur's confidence blurs as he looks at himself in the mirror. He is not human and he never will be. He puts his N95 on in a futile attempt to cover as much of his face as possible. Illspur hates his face, and masks are a serendipitous way to hide it. He the rubber straps behind his horns, and begins to head out. *Human masks are far smaller than I am used to.*



The finely dressed demon steps out of his small two-bedroom house in Hell. A deep breath fills his insides. Hell reeks of wet playdough and the ram-parts of sprinkles. The skies are dark and there is a maroon mist hanging in the air that reaches into your nostrils in vain attempts to invert them. Illspur walks a few steps from his home and begins

his commute to the surface world. *Be cool.*

Illspur's work commute consists of three parts;

1. Standing in his front yard in hell.
2. A deafening boom.
3. Appearing in the parking lot of the office building he works at.

Illspur walks into the office to see the hustle of the workplace. He towers over his earthly coworkers.

Illspur is a large creature of ten feet in height and five feet in width. He is a monster and it shows.

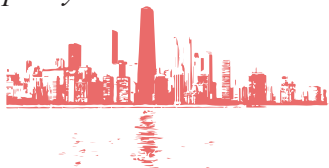
Doors bend and creak as he walks through them.

*Energize yourself, Illspur! C'mon c'mon. She won't like you if you don't like yourself.*

Illspur sits down at his desk in his comically too-small for him roly chair and begins to type out a sales report. The demon has the best sales out of anyone in the company and his boss wants him to head a conference in two weeks to discuss his "tactics"...

his tactics are... well... he makes a call, "Hello, is this Mr. Connors of Soil Construction?... excellent! YOU WANT TO BUY LARGE MACHINES FROM THE GEOGRINDER CORPORATION..." the pits that are Illspur's eyes fill with flame as he awaits a reply, "very good, and what would you like to put in that order?--" as he closes the deal with Soil Construction, Katie McMan fumbles into the office-- late and chaotic. Katie lays her bag on the ground and stamps herself at the desk next to Illspur in a huff. She looks up at Illspur and smiles gently at him, "hey there fella."

*oh shit she's pretty.*



"Weather!" Illspur states very matter of factly-- like a rock would.

Katie waits a moment trying to process the statement, "You got that right!" she agrees.

"Is it summer? Or winter?" *you're blowing it.*

"It's November. 'You doing okay Illspur?"

"I just closed another sale."

"Ooh right. Jordan wants you to give a big talk in a few weeks about your..." Katie puts up figure quotes "...sales tactics. Are you nervous?"



"I have many things that make me nervous. Telling a group of my superiors that I sell large machines very well because of my innate temptation is well up on the list.-- yes I am nervous."



Illspur's coworkers have long since gotten over the fact that they work alongside a Hellspawn and their feelings have now switched over to the mundane frustrations one would have with every other coworker. Illspur engages in pointless pleasantries. Illspur's lunch smells bad. Illspur wants to start a company bowling league.



Illspur and Katie get back to work not speaking to one another for an hour and a half until Katie looks over at him. Illspur's eyes are large holes in his face that if one were to reach their hand into, they would not feel any boundaries, and once their hand was taken it would be covered in a thick layer of black ash. It is an apt statement to say one could literally get lost in Illspur's eyes, but, Katie McMan seems to get lost in them in a much more figurative and romantic sense. "So... Are you excited for Saturday?" Katie asks, lifting her eyebrows and smiling. Illspur's mind goes haywire, *play it cool. Be cool. Talk human. Don't seem overly excited. Be cool. Not too cool. Act like you care. You do care.* "Yes." Illspur says nonchalantly, Katie does a full stop on her paperwork and turns toward Illspur, "Oh yeah? What's on the itinerary?"

# THE DIAMOND LINE

“I was thinking we could go to Hell and get dinner.”

“Hell? Like Hell Hell?”

“Yes, I live there. I am a demon... didn't you know that?”

“Is it safe?”

Illspur pauses a moment and thinks about how to respond, “You live in Chicago.”

“Yeah, but you're talking about actual, capital H, Hell.” Katie's tone is more joking and concerned.

“I will ensure your safety. I just figured Hell would be easier as there are more demons that look like humans than there are humans that look like demons.”

“You don't need to explain yourself. As long as it's safe, I would love to go to Hell with you.”



On Saturday Illspur booms onto the sidewalk in front of Katie's apartment building at 7:55 pm and waits outside for 15 mins. A child begins to cry nearby and Illspur looks over to see a mother consoling her baby as they walk into the building. The mother glares at Illspur. *You make children cry*, he thinks to himself.



Katie walks out of the apartment 15 minutes late, in a blue flannel and jeans under a large navy winter coat. “Hey, you ready to go?” she asks.

“...Yes, I am.” Illspur is not very good at hiding his interior monologue, “you look ba--” *don't beautiful... you look beautiful.*”

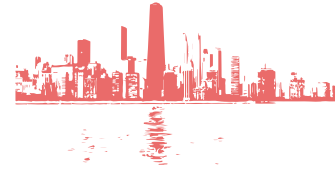
Katie McMan smiles, “Thank you. You look very nice too.” Illspur looms in front of her with no clear motive or direction. Katie looks around the area and asks, “so how do we get to Hell?” she adds a little figure wiggle on the word “Hell” to lighten the reality for herself.

Illspur holds out his hand and Katie places hers in it. In an instant, there is a loud BOOM, and the chilly city of Chicago is replaced by the burning stone floors of Hell just outside of Illspur's home. Illspur moves his mouth but all Katie can hear is a ringing noise in her ears. After Illspur gets out a few more sentences with no reply from his date, he understands what has happened and places his hands in ornate positions on Katie's head and speaks one word with power and intent, and suddenly Katie's hearing returns to her. Katie looks around at the new landscape she is in. There are houses lining a street. There is grass in yards-- albeit red grass. Each house with its own shrubbery and flavor. it's a suburb she thinks to herself, it's really hot here. Katie takes off her coat and looks around more “Illspur...” Katie starts, “... this is just like Stranger Things.” Illspur stares concernedly at Katie Mcman, “I don't think that's right,” he replies.

Illspur tenses his body and his earthly button-down and dress pants erupt in embers and gives way to more traditional hellish attire. From the waist down the demon is dawned in the hide of a beast that a young man dreamed of once during a night terror. His torso is covered by nothing, however, when Katie stares for too long at it she sees constantly morphing images over top of his skin. The images are strange dreams. Warped whispers. Distorted. Unnatural pictures. Like the art of Dave Mckean.

“Forgive me, I must go into my house to retrieve my mask--my demon mask, I mean...Covid isn't in Hell yet-- You are welcome to come inside so that you aren't standing out here alone.” *What are you doing?! Inviting her into your house? You*

*should have brought the mask with you.* Illspur begins to walk into his home. Katie follows.



Katie is blown away by how almost normal the house is. The walls a ceiling are all slightly off-kilter and the decor is not gothic or macabre-- it is downright gory. A painting of a woman whose mouth and hands are covered in blood hangs by the front door, and across from that a series of pictures of a human leviathan desolating a town are framed on the wall sequentially, like a morbid slide show. At the end of the leviathan pictures, there is a picture of a human in a beautiful red dress. A familiar human... "Who is this a picture of?" Katie asks.

"Oh, that? That's a pi--" Illspur is cut off by a new voice calling out, "IS SHE HERE?!" the voice is of Illspur's roommate, Trose, who busts out from his bedroom down the hall. Trose is a gaunt fish of a man. "I didn't think you would get her back here so soon, you dog you!" Trose slaps Illspur's belly with the back of his hand lightly. Illspur, who at this moment wants to drop dead, says, "it's nothing like that. We are just here to get my mask." *I am exploding you with my mind I am exploding you with my mind I am exploding you with my mind I am exploding you with my mind.*

"Oh sure..." Trose says through a shit-eating grin. "oh, hey..." Trose directs his attention to Katie, "if you break my friend's heart, I will erase you from existence." Katie's eyes widen as Illspur interrupts the exchange, "he's kidding!"

"No, I'm not. "

"Yes, he is."

"Your family will not remember you." Katie squeaks out a quick, "is this a joke? Can he do that?"

"N-no, it's not. Yes, he can. but he won't." after this remark, Illspur pushes Trose aside and he leads Katie to his bedroom, "let's go".

Illspur's room is only a mess because the "things owned" to "spots to put things" ratio is wildly off. Katie looks around the room and is taken aback by some of the things that she sees, "what is this?" she asks while pointing at the severed head on the bedside table. The head is still putting itself back together from this morning's alarms. "Oh, that's my Prometheus alarm," Illspur says while opening his closet. "Is it alive?" Katie asks. "That is a deeply complicated question. Short answer... no?" Illspur shrugs his massive shoulders, he is unsure if this is the proper response. The demon grabs his Hellish mask. The mask is the skull of a creature that is a stranger to human eyes. He places the skull upon his face. The skull is long like a bull's but the eyes are far larger and perfectly match the shape of Illspur's own.

"Is it custom to wear a mask like that in Hell?" Katie asks.

"No... it's a personal choice."

"Is there a reason?"

"None that I wish to say out loud" *You are scaring the hoes dude.*

Katie looks past Illspur at the clothes hung up in his closet and she spots a red dress. The same red dress that the person in the photo in the hall was wearing... Katie looks around the room for another thing to ask about. *There!* Katie's eyes make their way over to a rock sitting on a shelf. "What's that rock about?"

"That's my Rock That Makes You Explode," Illspur says as if it were something that everyone has. Katie stares at her date in utter bafflement for five seconds. Katie breaks the silence by asking "what? Why do you have that? Y'know what, never mind. Where are we going to eat?"

# THE DIAMOND LINE

The demon and the human walk for twenty minutes to a restaurant called “Excessively Long Horns”-- legally distinct from its earthly counterpart. Illspur goes up and requests a table for two and the couple is seated shortly.

“Alright, everyone at work is dying to know...” Katie starts, “why do you work at a forklift distributor?”

“Forklift?”

“Yeah, that’s what we sell...”

“I thought we sold large machines.” Illspur contorts his face, but no one can see because he has a mask on.

A voice interrupts the short revelation, “Can I get you all anything to drink?” the waiter places two menus on the table. “I’ll take an HCI,” Illspur says without a second thought. “...just a water for me thanks,” Katie states.



“Well, back to your question, I work for Geogrinder because I needed a change in scenery. I worked as a torturer in Hell for hundreds of years, but I was... bored. I wanted to be where people are. I shined as a torturer-- excelled-- I got promotions, I rose up the ranks, but I was not who I wanted to be. I wanted to feel the sun. I wanted to breathe air that wasn’t made of fiberglass. I wanted to be a person. I will never be a person. I’m 1,034, I am in my prime, and I couldn’t stay there. I went to the Hell Exchange Labor Program and Geogrinder hired me so now I get a little taste of normal life.”

“Illspur... thank you for sharing that with me.”

“Geogrinder also provides dental... so that is certainly a plus,” Illspur jokes as the waiter brings about the drinks. The two glasses placed in front

of the couple are identical. “I’ll be back shortly to take your guy’s orders,” the waiter quickly slips away.

“How old did you say you were?” Katie sips her water.

“I am 1034 years old.”

“Damn,” Katie smiles, “kinda robbing the cradle here aren’t you?”

“... uh I don’t-- I don’t know. There is no way for me to answer that and come out on top.”



The two of them enjoy a nice meal together. Katie does not recognize any of the dishes on the menu but Illspur gives recommendations. Illspur and Katie tell each other stories from their wildly different childhood. Illspur tells Katie what his favorite movies are and Katie tells him what a Bechdel test is.



Later in the night, after dinner, the pair goes out and walks to the viewing pavilion of the punishment of Sisyphus. There is a crowd of demons gathered around with them also viewing the mythic man. A goliath of a human shakes and quivers a mile away under the weight of a bolder twice his size. Sisyphus grits his teeth to the point of them bending under the stress of his jaw as he pushes the rock halfway up a hill. “He is doing very well today, making good time,” Illspur states in admiration, “this is one of the great punishments, the gold standard that all torturers strive to reach.”

“It’s really something...” Katie says, not really knowing how to react.

“I used to design and execute punishments. Did I



mention that before?”

“You did. I can’t imagine that there’s a lot of enjoyment to be had in a job like that.”

“There were some good parts...” Illspur leans on the railing of the pavilion, “when I got my first big promotion-- well, that was probably the happiest I have ever been.”

“What was the promotion?”

“It was about 100 years ago, I was tasked with torturing H.P. Lovecraft when he died. I had never gotten a case like his before, it needed to be big. Of course back then Lovecraft was a nobody.”

“What was the punishment?”

“Oh, I would put him in a dress and force him to confront his sexuality and gender identity in front of his abusive mother.”

“A red dress?”

“Yeah. that’s who the photo was in my house, that you were asking about.”



There is a gnarly scream followed by the grinding of rubble and stone as Sisyphus drops the boulder and it rolls back down the hill. Katie and Illspur look on in astonishment. “People on Earth like to imagine that he’s happy,” Katie says lightly.

Illspur does not care for this hypothetical, “If he is, we aren’t doing our jobs... *they*-- they aren’t doing their jobs.”

“No offense, but, Hell is a bummer,” Katie says joining Illspur in leaning on the rail.

Without the bolder obscuring the view of Sisyphus, Katie can see him more clearly. Sisyphus is

a man of 15 feet tall. His hair is long, wet, black strands of inky curls. His muscles are far more developed than anyone Katie has seen on earth, his muscles have grown so far that they have ripped the skin leaving tears and scars along his body. Every inch of him is calloused, bruised, and dirty. The hill has distinct marks on the ground where the giant has walked for thousands of years, pushing the ever-looming stone to the crest of the hill only for it to fall once more to the start.

Illspur stares longingly out at the hill, you blew it, man. *You blew it big time. You need to change your name and skip town.* “This place is a bummer,” Illspur starts, “Hell was made to punish those who stayed from God’s path. Those first angels who fell here tell us how Hell is just as much a punishment for the demons as is it for the humans because we will never feel Heaven’s grace. *They* disobeyed God and *they* were punished for it. *I* never disobeyed anyone, I was born here. Forged here. I never knew that Holy place. For a long time, I thought that Hell was no more a punishment to me than our office job is to you. Existence was a minor annoyance-- an itch. I thought that Earth would be an escape from the monotony, but having you here with me today has made me see that the place that raised me has made me far too different. I am a monster to your people. I do not belong on Earth. I am not human. I will never be human. Our worlds may look similar at times but they are fundamentally different. I might not like it but, I am a de--” Katie stops his words, “Oh, shut the fuck up. Don’t go monologuing just because I don’t like Hell. IT’S HELL. how about for our second date I take you around Chicago and exposition dump on *you*. I like you, I think you’re the coolest guy I’ve met, but god damn you haven’t asked me a single question all night.”

“You want to go on another date?”

“If you can put up with Earth a bit longer.”



*Monarch*

*monotype*

*m.c. Kiele*

## Hope for a New Generation

# on mountaintops we're alone as the sea rises

EMMA BRACKEN

in the name of being honest,  
if i could  
i'd chain your bones to mine  
so you couldn't run  
even if you tried  
we'd wake sharing marrow  
in afternoon sunlight  
i'd walk you home  
just to turn around  
and drag you right back down  
the street to my house  
where i'd lay with you  
in a fire  
and sing you to sleep  
while we burn and burn  
into one pile of ash  
nothing but dust  
sharing wind  
strung along,  
strung together  
a planet of ice  
its fiery twin  
letting the breeze  
take our minds off  
bleeding knees  
briefly entwined  
eternally alone  
watching the water rise.





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