

The Alcalá review

volume 2 / issue 1



The Autumn 2016 Staff of The Alcalá Review

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letter from --- the editors

When The Alcalá Review began in the Autumn of 2015, it's intention was to give a publishing platform to the winners of the Cropper Creative Writing Contest. We have grown from our humble beginnings of five inspired undergraduate founders to the current staff of 20 editors and active members. AR has always been driven by one goal: to foster the University of San Diego's creative writing community, and produce a biannual testament to the talent USD cultivates.

In this third semester of activity, The Alcalá Review has put together successful creative writing workshops and open mic nights, and become a recognized organization with the University. We are incredibly grateful for the opportunities given to us by USD and made possible by our donors – those who have graciously bought the previous journal and those who have donated to our recent crowdfunding initiative.

This issue features works from USD undergraduates, hand selected by the AR executive staff. The works thematically seek out the extraordinary in the everyday, be it the tired family car, an extremely uncomfortable meal, or the self-conscious struggle of writing itself. Reflective of beauty in reality is the photography of AR's own Savannah Abrishamchian, as she juxtaposes bright details and interesting textures, embracing familiar entities and capturing them to reveal the magic that lies in daily encounters.

To you, our reader, we hope it shows that we have thought of you in every step of this process. We can say with confidence that every single contributor has poured hours of work and care into the details, aesthetic, and presentation of the very book you are holding. This is the best of USD Creative Writing, crafted for you. With each turn of the page, our aim is to make you feel something. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote: "That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong." Upon reaching the final page, we hope you feel that you belong.

All the Best,
The Editors.

Bri Jurries, Editor-in-Chief
Ryan Samson, Executive Editor of Poetry
Joey Markus, Executive Editor of Nonfiction
James Cho, Executive Editor of Fiction



c r o p p e r

c o n t e s t

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c o n t e s t

c r o p p e r

featuring

FICTION WINNER: MILES PARNEGG
opportunity for growth

FICTION RUNNER UP: JESSIKA MALONE
secrets

POETRY WINNER: MAGENTA REYNOLDS
do not let her fall
i am afraid to write a poem about you
he tells me to write the moon, but

POETRY RUNNER UP: BRAD DAVID
i've watched you become
she
no more blood

FICTION WINNER: SEAN OUYE
an indictment of farming--especially celery

FICTION RUNNER UP: ERIC KRAFT
black dog

opportunity
for growth
by miles
partnering



My dad's one of those corporate types—penny loafers and slacks and phrases like “opportunity cost.” He's got business cards and hands-free Bluetooth earphone things. He has some odd consulting gig where real estate companies on the verge of bankruptcy hire him to come in and have some sort of intervention thing straight out of “Glengarry Glen Ross.” I think my dad's a real fuckin' prick for not pursuing something noble like law or chess or something and instead spent his life making money off other people losing money and whatever. So I don't really look forward to my dad's visits very much, mostly because he quizzes me about the monetary value and of majoring in history and that only as a gentle reminder he's expecting a positive return on his investing in my education (which admittedly isn't cheap, but fuck him.)

Anyway, he comes to town last week to do an “installation,” which is what he calls his real estate interventions, and so he's in town for like four days and he insists on having dinner all four nights at like myriads of restaurants he found on Yelp. And lo and behold we find ourselves at this little place called Café Provence that has a black and white checkered floor and the specials written on some chalkboard in French, but all the waiters are wearing Converse sneakers and look like the sort of people who work for Save the Children or Greenpeace—the ones who prey on your goodwill as a citizen on street corners and in shopping malls. And so we sit down and we start looking at the menu and my dad reminds me to put my napkin on my lap and I obey knowing that it's too early in the meal for open conflict. I look at the menu and it's all in that fake American-French language that says “potatoes au gratin” but is in reality just a bowl of cheesy potatoes you could've made with at home with Kraft and some Tupperware. But my dad loves this shit and especially loves to hit on the waitresses and to my horror our waitress, who introduces herself as Juliana, has to be maybe top three most gorgeous women I've seen since moving to California (freckles, dimples, long neck) and immediately my dad recognizes this and starts to give her the old tableside wheel and deal.

I interrupt my dad mid-sentence and say we'd just like some waters. Juliana goes into the back and my dad puts on his glasses and crosses his

legs and looks at the menu as if it were some sacred text and when Juliana comes back and takes our order, my dad decides it's an apt time to engage in a little informal sociology.

"Juliana, I have a theory," says my dad, taking off his glasses. "I've noticed over the years that waiters who choose to write down orders of customers make roughly thirty percent fewer mistakes than waiters who take orders by memory. Now, I've noticed that you aren't going to write down our order."

I go into a full-body wince. Juliana laughs. I am instantly more attracted to her.

"That's right, I'm not going to write down your order."

"And you feel confident that you won't make a mistake?"

"Oh, yeah. Writing down actually makes it harder for me. Jumbles my thoughts."

"Fascinating," says my dad, looking at me as though I'm supposed to jot this down in a notebook.

"I'll have the salmon burger," I say.

"And I'll have the halibut, but with no green beans," my dad says, winking at Juliana.

She takes our menus and walks over the cash register/computer thing and inputs the order. The blue light of the screen makes her face glow and she curls a lock of hair behind her ear.

"She's *cute*," my dad says.

"She's only about four decades out of your age range," I say.

"I'm off the market."

"Mercifully."

"Hey, now, you have plenty to learn from your old man," he says, smoothing his white napkin over his knee.

"By all means, tell all."

"Perhaps when you're in a more receptive mood."

"Fine by me."

Eventually our food comes out and of course my dad's halibut has green beans laid on top of it in some delicate little arrangement. I give him a look of absolute death praying with every ounce of spirituality my soul can

muster to not say anything to Juliana. He cuts into his fish, takes a bite, nods in approval.

“A mistake was made.”

“You really give a shit?”

“I find it compelling from a research standpoint.”

“Right.”

“Now, I also find myself compelled to ask Juliana where in her order-taking process did the mistake occur.”

“Surprising.”

“What we have here is a classic sales situation: does it actually do Juliana a great deal of good from a career standpoint for me to bring up her error, even if it causes her embarrassment?”

“No.”

“And do I have a right as a paying customer to draw her attention to what is evidently an ineffective strategy? Might I actually have an obligation to future customers to bring up Juliana’s shortcoming to her and allow her an opportunity for growth?”

“No.”

Another waiter passing the table asks how our dishes are, if he can get us anything. Of course: “Now, I have a question,” says my dad and then runs through a brief summary of his “research.” The waiter laughs and humors my dad and says the only possible way green beans ended up on his halibut was due to human error. The waiter also said that, in his experience, he received more tips if he took orders without writing them down, apparently looking all smart and shit. And while my dad and the waiter are now having this intimate discussion about the psychology of order-taking at fine dining establishments, Juliana comes over looking adorably shameful and admits to all of us that she completely forgot to input the no green bean request into the computer and also claims that there was some weird reverse psychology at play because the second she became aware of her order-taking technique the whole thing was bound to throw her off.

“This is remarkable,” my dad says. “We were just having the conversation about the costs and benefits of bringing this up with you. Of course, we

want to spare you the embarrassment, but it's just so fascinating considering what we said earlier!"

"He gets like this when he eats halibut," I say. Juliana laughs at this. So does the waiter.

"But now, how do I reflect this service when I tip you? Because if I tip you as though there was not a mistake made, then I'm rewarding an ineffective behavior, no?"

Juliana laughs uncomfortably. "Well," she says, "If you do tip me at all then it just means you're a compassionate person and then you get to leave the restaurant knowing that, so it's kind of a win-win."

"And she's got smarts, too!" my dad says, looking at me in a what-are-you-waiting-for way.

We eat. It is good. I think I'm warming up to fish now that I'm in my twenties. When we get the bill I ask Juliana for another glass of water in hopes of getting her away from the table and my dad. I refuse to look at what my dad's scribbling on the check. He uses his own pen.

He says goodnight to Juliana when we leave, giving her a little bow. I smile at her in a way that I hope says, "I'm sorry" and "Remember me," simultaneously. While we're walking back to the car I stop and pretend to grope my pockets and shirt collar.

"Forgot my glasses inside," I say. I throw my dad the keys and he walks down to the car. I walk back inside the café and over to our table where the check is thankfully still there and I pull out the receipt and notice that my dad tipped five-percent and wrote "How come?" next to it. I look around and make sure no one's watching--I think the restaurant's closed now, anyway--and scribble over my dad's note and write THANK YOU on the bottom of the receipt. I pull out a twenty from my wallet and stick in the fold. As I'm walking out of the restaurant Juliana comes out through the steel double doors of the kitchen and she sees me and I wave. She says, "Have a good night!" and I take a toothpick from the plastic toothpick dispenser on the hostess stand and grab a peppermint. I promise myself that I'll come back and sit at the same table and order halibut with green beans, just because.

I cross the street without looking and some guy on a moped zooms by almost clipping my ankle with his little moped tire. I open the driver's side door and my dad's sitting there fiddling with the stereo with his glasses on the end of his nose.

"I'm driving," I say, because it's my car and he's done enough maneuvering for the night.

"You're standing in the middle of the street, son."

"I am standing in the middle of the street, father."

"You're becoming a hazard to traffic."

"Let me drive."

"Just get out of the road," he says, looking back over his shoulders for oncoming headlights. I take two steps backward into the street and I feel headlights wash over like warm water. I raise my hands out to my side in a waiting-on-you gesture.

"Waiting on you, old man," I say.

"Christ." He gets out of the driver's seat and takes a couple stumble steps and then half jogs around to the other side of the car, waving two apologetic hands to the small line of cars stopped by me in the street.

I get in and he gets in and says, "What's got into you?"

"You," I say, and jerk the stick into first and peel out in front of the line of cars before my dad even has time to shut his door. He puts on his seatbelt and it clicks in like the bolt-action on a rifle. He looks at me and I shift from second to third to fourth, but I don't put on my seatbelt.

secrets by
jessika
malone



I'm going to tell you a secret of mine. You might cringe after we're through and think I'm a terrible person, but this secret is gnawing away at me inside. I fear that if no one else shares this burden with me, I will succumb to the devouring process.

For the purpose of becoming acquainted, I'll preempt my secret with this: I have a fear of death. It's not a fear of *my* death per se--I don't worry about when or how I'll die. My death isn't the concern. But what is my concern is those near death, dying, or dead. I just can't do it. This aversion of death has become a defective part of my being.

As you can probably guess, cemeteries are my least favorite place. I'm not a believer in the supernatural, so it's not that I've got a fear of spirits or ghosts. I just can't help being creeped out walking amongst the tombstones and thinking about the hundreds of *bodies* beneath my feet, rotting away. I think about who they all were and what their lives must have been like, their work, dreams, families--everything--and this is where they all end up. This is where we all end up. We all become the material of the earth, until little enough of us is left that our plots can essentially be turned over to the next dead guy. I imagine how all these people suffered at their last breaths of life, the immense anguish over what unfinished business they might have preferred to tie up. The end of life is tragic to say the least and I am overwhelmed by it. Can you imagine what it feels like to die, knowing that this is the end of your life and that you will cease to exist at any moment? Neither can I. But I guess, I must admit that I'm also not a religious or spiritual person. I believe in the tangibles of life, what is living, and what is present in the moment, not in heaven, reincarnation, or any cosmic continuation. To me, death is like the black hole at the end of life, unfathomable, but final.

This issue with death was originally subtle, if you can believe it. I had a slow and mild exposure to sickness, hospitals, and death when I was a young child, but at some point, the fear took over my conscious control. I remember visiting a hospital for the first time when my dad had to get some sort of tissue flap removed from the inside of his throat. He fell asleep at the wheel once, a cop saw him veer off the road, and the courts were very concerned that it might happen again. Consequently, his driv-

er's license was suspended until he underwent this procedure that would somehow prevent him from falling asleep at the wheel again. My mom only complains that it made his nightly snoring worse ever since. But anyway, I remember squeaky floors, friendly nurses, jokes about how the hospital gown barely covered my dad's stomach, eating the ice cream that came frequently to soothe his throat, and visiting the hospital gift shop.

"Mommy, can I have this teddy bear?" Of course I fixated on the toys, rather than the somberly sterile environment of the hospital.

"Honey, why don't you pick something that daddy would like instead?" she said. "Hospital gift shops are for families to get necessary things like food, medicines, and get well goodies. Some people have to stay here long periods of time and its only fair for them to get this stuff."

I was blissfully unaware of the gravity that hung around every corner of the hospital, between doctors with bad news, spouses asleep for the long hours of a loved one's medically induced sleep, or hopeful parents of a child who wasn't expected to make it through emergency surgery. These tragedies were unconsidered as six year old me picked out a collection of sparkly, tropical bird stickers to decorate my dad's hospital cot with.

Mostly, it was a brief and positive first hospital experience, but I do remember there was another man that shared my dad's recovery room. The first day he was moaning quite a bit.

"Mommy, what's making that noise over there?"

"There's another patient behind that privacy curtain. Lots of hospital share rooms between their patients."

"Well, maybe he'd like some stickers too," I said, but before I could pull the curtain aside, my mom grabbed my wrist.

"Honey, I don't think it's a good idea to disturb him. He's resting."

The next day, my dad was released from the hospital. I noticed his moaning neighbor was gone. The curtain was pulled aside, the bed was made, and sunlight was pouring through the window. Surely a lot of things could have happened to this suffering individual, but even at age six, I believed he had died that night. Even after we had left, I didn't dare ask about the missing neighbor. I was afraid to have my suspicion confirmed.

The first and only funeral I've ever attended was when I was in the third grade. A family friend of mine lost one of her three brothers to a rare, feverish disease. He was out white water river rafting somewhere in South America and he returned home with a disease. They ran tests, were very serious and hush hush about his condition, but ultimately he passed away. There didn't seem much that the doctors could do for him. It was all very unexpected and tragic, especially since he was only twenty-two.

I remember being afraid to go to the church for his funeral service. I had never been to a funeral, seen a casket, or had any inkling as to what I was about to experience. I went along unwillingly because mom made the whole family go. We dressed up and sat together in one of the church pews. I expected to see a dead body or at least a casket containing one, but there wasn't. There was just a picture of the boy's smiling face and huge bouquets of flowers on either side of it. I fixated on this photo through the entire service, wondering where his body was. My brother sensed my discomfort.

"You know, the fever ate up his body," he leaned over and whispered in my ear, "They don't have anything left of him to bury, so they're going to bury his picture."

"Yeah right," I said, more to dissuade myself than him.

"No, it's true. I heard Diane say it to mom."

After the service, I refused to go up to the family and pay my respects to the photo. I couldn't go near it, now visualizing the photo as a body. I pretended that I was starving and needed food right away.

"Honey, can't you wait till they call us all to the refreshments. It's rude not to pay our respects to Tara's family."

"No, mommy, I need food now." I was getting a little hysterical because I was so afraid I would have to approach the photo. My mom led me out of the church to the side yard where a couple of tables were being set up with hors d'oeuvres. She grabbed a napkin, some crackers and cheese, and sat me down before returning to the line that had formed to give condolences to Tara's family. I was barely nibbling on a cheese wedge when I caught Tara's saddened eyes staring right through the church window at me. I don't remember talking at school with her much after that. I just didn't know what to say.

We didn't have many pets growing up, mostly because my mom is allergic. But I did get a hamster when I was ten. I begged incessantly to have some pet and I think I finally won her over with guilt, making her think her asthma was depriving me. She let me pick out a hamster from the pet store and we bought the biggest cage with all the attachments and toys on the market.

I spoiled little Chico, but probably wasn't the best hamster owner. I gave him baths every week, which he hated, trying to claw himself out of the sink, only to fall back in again every time. I never thought to stop bathing him. I fed him all sorts of foods because I liked to give him treats. I even gave him chicken once, thinking hamsters were omnivores, but clearly this was faulty logic seeing as how hamsters don't hunt chicken in the wild. And we kept the little guy on top of the washing machine. The laundry room was the only indoor place my mom would allow. Unfortunately, our washing machine had insane power. The spin cycle probably felt like a world-shattering earthquake to the little guy, sometimes several times a day.

Just a little over a year of having him, we noticed some weird swellings and bizarre urinating behaviors. He seemed to be having a lot of trouble, so my mom took him to the vet one day I was at school.

"I have some bad news about Chico," she said when she picked me up from school. "The vet says he has something called 'wet tail.' It's a fairly uncommon disease to pet hamsters, but it's an infection in his intestines."

I asked if it could be treated, still believing in the magical power of vets and doctors.

"Unfortunately, no. Even if they could treat a hamster's intestines, Chico is very sick and probably in pain." She paused. "I made an appointment two days from now to put him down, honey." I started to cry. "I'm sorry, baby, but it's the nicest thing we can do for him."

At ten years old, I was adamantly against euthanasia, but really only because it still resulted in death. The day of the scheduled euthanasia, I couldn't go with my mom to the vet. I couldn't stand there in the room, or waiting room, as they administered the lethal drug. I couldn't walk in with a live hamster and walk out without one. I just knew I couldn't handle bei-



ng there. But that morning before school, I also couldn't handle picking him up one last time and saying goodbye. I couldn't look into his little, bulbous eyes knowing that in a few hours he wouldn't be a part of this world anymore. So, I went and cried at school. A few years after Chico's death, when I was more prepared, I researched "wet tail" on the computer. Turns out, it was a bacterial infection caused by extreme stress. I was shocked, but I started to think about all the handling, feeding, baths, and the washing machine spin cycle that were probably to blame. Regardless, I was the real murderer of my pet hamster.

In the 6th grade, my grandfather was diagnosed with cancer. I remember going to visit my grandparents in their Florida vacation condo the spring before he passed. There were a few strange medical tubes and machines in the bathroom and my grandfather seemed unwilling to go out and do much. I didn't think much of it. I had a Neopets internet account and the condo complex had a community pool, both of which filled the lag time. We were only in the Florida condo for about a week before my grandparents took off on a cruise and we went back home. I didn't know until we returned home that that was the last time we'd stay in that condo, the that was the last family vacation we'd have, or that that would be the last time I ever saw my grandfather.

Soon after we got home from the trip, my mom told us that he was sick. He had prostate cancer. I didn't even know what cancer really was.

"Didn't Garrett's aunt get cancer?" I asked.

"Yes, but she had breast cancer," my brother said.

"But didn't she die?"

"She did," my mom answered.

"Will Morfar die?" I asked.

"No, he'll get treatment, right mom?" my brother said.

"After they get back home from the cruise, he'll start chemotherapy."

"Can he wait that long?" I asked.

"Yes, the doctor thinks they've caught it early."

Well, the doctor was ultimately wrong. Upon return home and the start of the treatment, they all knew his original diagnosis wasn't as serious as it needed to be. They upped his chemo treatment—an aggressive approach they thought he was healthy enough for and would essentially make up for the lo-

-st treatment time. Cancer doesn't work that way, though.

After two months, he was too weak to travel between the hospital and home. They set him up with an in-home care unit and sent nurses every day to my grandparent's house to administer both chemo and morphine. My grandmother did the rest-feeding, washing, emptying of his bed pan when he could no longer get up, and just sat by his side, keeping him company. That July, my mother made the decision to travel out and help.

"Kids, I'm going on a short trip to visit your grandparents. Mormor's having a rough time taking care of Morfar and she needs some help for a little while," she said.

I was surprised. I hadn't heard much about his cancer since she originally told us about it.

"I think you both should come with me."

"Why?" we asked.

"Well, they're going to take Morfar off chemotherapy. The doctor doesn't think it's helping anymore." She took a deep breath in. "I think Morfar would like to see you kids."

I knew she was softening the story for us, but I guessed what it meant anyway. My brother agreed to go on the spot, but I couldn't.

"Monica, you don't want to go?"

"I'm not sure..."

"You're not sure, what?"

"I'm not sure I can." I looked at my mother, unable to make my eleven year old brain come up with the words that expressed why I couldn't go. I couldn't go because I had never seen a dead or near dead person before. I couldn't go because I wasn't sure if I would cry, throw up, or get scared. I couldn't go because I wanted to remember my Morfar with color in his cheeks, chasing us around with a video camera, and singing loudly about his "Red Rocket" Pontiac Firebird and about babies peeing in their cribs. I couldn't go because something in my eleven year old brain knew I wasn't capable of handling the grief. Somehow, in my eleven year old answer, my mother knew.

A few weeks later, my dad and I took them to the airport and they flew twenty hours to my grandparents. Most of the nights they were gone, I laid

awake wondering if I had made the right decision. But twelve days later, they came home. Both were in good spirits. My brother got to shadow our cousin around at her school—his highlight of the trip—and he laughed about how funny it was that all the kids thought California was spelled with a “K.”

I asked how Morfar was doing.

“He was very happy to see us and have the company, I think. He also hopes you’re doing well. I told him you’re looking forward to starting Middle School in the Fall.”

I was silent after that. There was a message in that response we both didn’t want to acknowledge.

A few nights after their return home, my mother was out for a walk with a neighbor friend when the phone rang. I knew my father and brother couldn’t be bothered to answer, so I did. It was my grandmother. She thought I was her daughter. I had to interrupt words I couldn’t understand, but a language I would always recognize to tell her it was me. Her tone softened. She told me to have my mother call her back later.

It wasn’t normal for my grandmother to call this late. I ran outside with a strange fear I couldn’t understand. My mother was just coming around the bend to finish a neighborhood lap when she saw me.

“What is it, honey?”

“Mormor just called. She wants you to call her back.” At my words, she stopped for a second and then ran from up the street, down to our house like she was trying to catch something. Out there alone with her nightly walking buddy, we looked at each other.

“Maybe you should go see that she’s okay,” she said. I nodded.

In my parent’s bedroom, my mother was holding the phone up to her ear. She was perched on the king sized bed and tears were streaming down her face as she listened. I was peeking through the opening of the door, not sure if I should go in. I understood that my grandfather had passed away that night. That’s why my grandmother had called. But I wasn’t sure how I was supposed to react. Should I cry, should I hug my mom, should I go tell my brother?

As soon as she put the phone down, she looked at me in the doorway. Her eyes told me what to do. I went right in and I hugged her. We fell back in the bed.

“He passed away in his sleep,” she said when she had regained her breath enough to speak. “Mormor said she sat with him, held his hand, and listened to his last breaths.” She paused. “I guess he willed himself to live just enough longer for your brother and I to see him one last time.”

That was it. Her words unleashed the fear that had existed under my repression all along. It busted me open and I cried. It wasn’t for the sole reason of my grandfather’s death, or even seeing my mother so upset. That night I cried because I could imagine one of his last thoughts was how I never said goodbye to him.

This is my secret. Guilt. And I’m here at your grave, Morfar, as if there were some way for you to hear my apology now, fourteen years later.



magenta
reynolds

Do not let her fall

Instead, watch.
Watch the way she wanders.
She is tall for you.
Track her through the crowd, and
she will feel your potency. I think
you are meant to watch. . .
I think you see the magic in her eyes
(eyes like earth)
as they sink into the moon.
Last time you found her
with her chin lifted you asked,
how often do you look up?
But she showed you how it curves.
And you felt that through her veins.
Swallow your questions,
and watch. Her toes curl
when she dreams
about you.
Will you notice that?
She needs to be soothed
by her sounds of sleep.
Will you hesitate
in the morning
before you reach down
to wake her?
Watch. -When you bend,
the tips of your dreaded
locks bounce from her
cheeks like rain
as it drops. Watch.
The next time
she stretches her shoulder
blades towards the soil,
catch them. Lift her by each
pale, bent elbow-
kiss them. Watch her
come alive. Then-if you
have the time-
gather each of the small,
broken pieces and tuck them
into her front pocket. Or
into yours.
But do not love her.
She does not want
to be loved.

I am afraid to write a poem about you

Because my words
already feel familiar.
You are entirely
unfamiliar to me.

How can I sound
unfamiliar
about the way
I watch you

while you sleep—
your rounded face
smashed sideways
into my thin pillow?

How can I explain
lips made of mango paste
or swinging dreadlocks
soaked in wintermint?

Your skin feels like
the underside of
stretched leather.
They'll ask me if

you have a sound.
I don't think they will believe
I listen to the daisies
sprouting out your fingertips.

How could I hear something so delicate?

He tells me to write the moon, but

I am afraid I am
No master of knowing
Stringy white pulp made
Of silver substance, though

I cannot think it hardened
like my heavy bones—
Doesn't your light float in
Its bath of blindness?

Let me hold your strands
Of secrets between my toes:
I will curl them in until
They reek of magic.

I am only meant to
Rinse in the diluted
Lilac filling of your
Underserved craters:

Asteroid gashes that leave
Bruises I can soften.
One night you woke up
Burning—in sleep, I felt

Dreams of snow framed
Mountains—softened stars
And small boats swimming
Away to your far shores.

If I might dive from
Their sails—wash clear
The fears between my ribs;
The silt behind my ears...

I am no winged traveller—
I cannot know the full pulse

of your wonder—I am
no firefly to know your glow.

So I tell him only:
Make love on moonshine.

The background is a solid pink color with a pattern of white, irregularly shaped bubbles or foam. The bubbles are of various sizes and are more concentrated in the lower-left and lower-right areas, creating a textured, bubbly effect.

brad
david

I've Watched You Become

Haikued by tintypes
 of a cherry tree
Marble-mansioned
 by Duke Kahanamoku therapy
I've seen you Hitlered
 by Maya Angelou
Karaokeed
 by reality show
You've been crayoned
 by cocaine
Marcus Garveyed
 again, and again
Quarters only
 your lips sometimes read
Bo Jacksoned by the bank
 by the bank and bed
You used to be so
 Burning Spear
Till Walmart Langston Hughesed your blood
 into Budweiser
Recently I've been watching you
 James Dean Death
Macbethed by Prada
 till you Cronussed breath
What happens when
 you Major Kong my poem
Into Munch's scream?
 into Walden's home?
We move into my blue denim jacket
 as the sun Jimi Hendrixes to night
I Michelangelo your goose bumps
 vinylled in the riffing light

She

bled
through the pieces
of her heels
until rod
by red iron rod
cities bucked
and surged behind her:
spinal cord
of lights and asphalt
riffed softly
by the fingers
of the coroner moon—
I am tendon
I am mud

pressed
her ear
to the seam
of the beetle-wing sky
and thought she heard
the whir:
one hundred prayer flags
like sea-worn glass
in the palm of a five-day-old child:
something
in the slick machinery
of morning—
But like a pebble
I am sincere

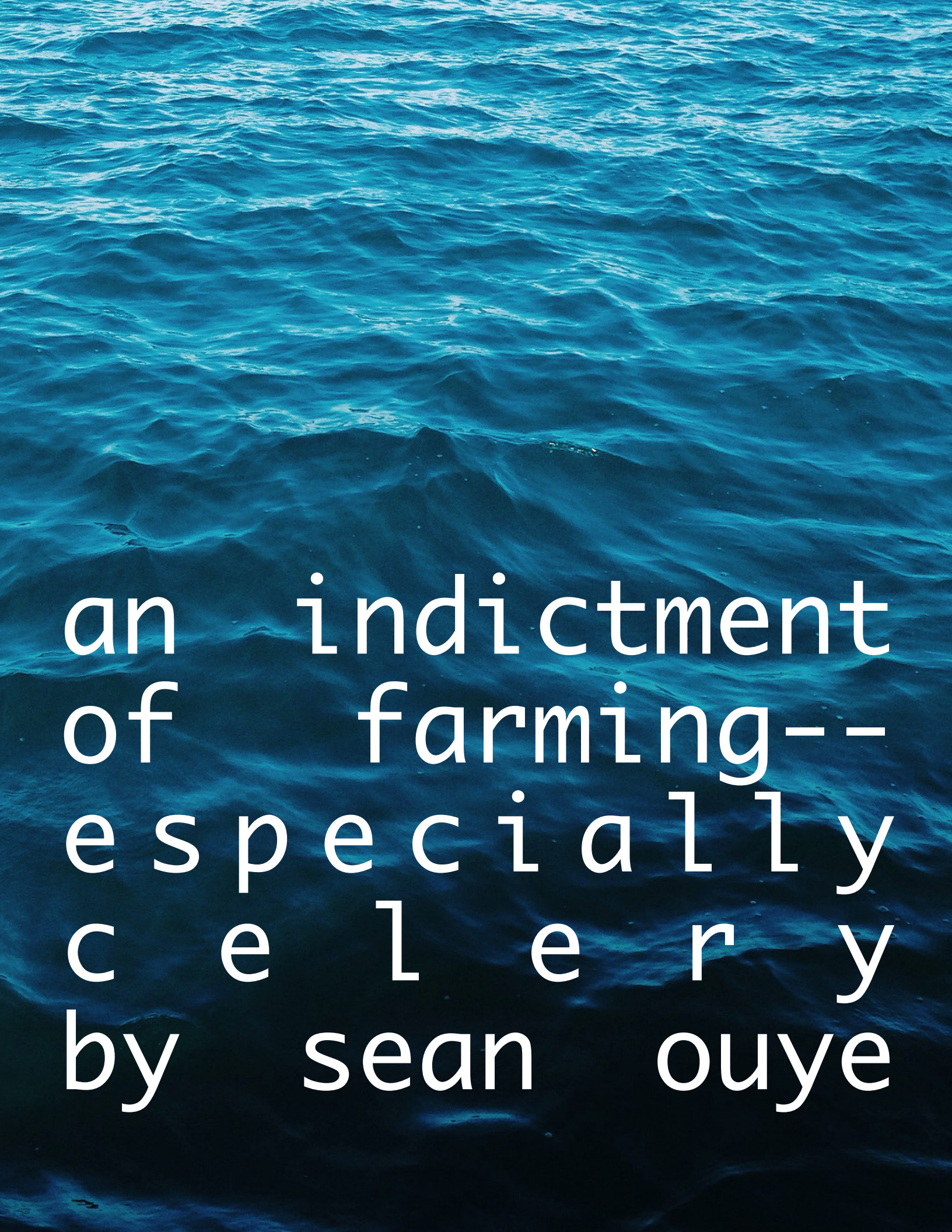
saw
in front of her
an ocean:
purple rice paper
she gathered
around her wrist
then walked through the bowl
of shells
and heaving fish
dripping indigo
into their mouths
on her way–
*So undress my skin
of metal*

traded
the moon her voice
for its marbled shawl
licking
the quiet dark
like boysenberry jam
till her gleaming
purpled tongue
would receive
like a daughter
her voice from the moon
when she arrives–
*And hold my cold fists
in your jaws*

No More Blood

I have no more blood for you
to light your cigarette—I bleed
rebar and redwood dust that settle
like amateur calligraphy upon the morning
newspaper you read, eating bagels
with Billie Holiday—so scoop like sugar
cement into my nerves: I know,
I know I know I know
that the flamingos queuing at the stained glass
fractured their second legs years ago
and hide their tremor
from you—in the sky—
as buzzards brood over my bones
laid bare by your whip I know,
I know I know I know
your red flesh is flush
with maggots—you part the dust
of the basin water, your nails cut for God!
Oh! to scrape my skeleton
on the creosote bush, I know,
it may only prick your skin
and spit back your liquored blood.





an indictment
of farming--
especially
celebrary
by sean ouye

Part of the 6th floor of my dad's office building used to be a fine dining restaurant. The ceilings are high and the mood lighting is ill fit for a real estate development business, but luckily, the floor to ceiling glass windows let in enough light throughout a 9 to 5 work day. I noticed that Yutaka, my father's uncle, comes in every Monday before lunch with his wife, Betty, to pick up a check from our bookkeeper, who I always thought looked like an Asian Elvis with his shiny, slicked back hair. I have rarely seen Yutaka outside of my father's office in Torrance, California.

I placed the cup of water I had just boiled in the kitchen on one of my newly bought coasters on top of my desk. I keep tea packets in a drawer in my room to use on cold nights such as the one I was preparing to interview my Great Uncle Yutaka. Before I called him, I dunked a Jasmine Tea packet in my cup of hot water and wrote some notes and side remarks on the question sheet I had arranged to keep me on track for my first interview ever.

Yutaka is a sturdy, country man who drops his G's and speaks in double negatives, uncommon for a Japanese American. He has eyeglasses that were popular in the 70's with its oversized frames and thick brow bar connecting the tops of the rims. I got into the habit of preemptively switching my chair with one of the less cushioned chairs, so that he cannot refuse my offer to sit in mine which has ample back support. He wears a dark polo, usually navy blue, tucked into a pair of light blue jeans, faded around the knee cap likely due to old age. His skin is tanned from farming and gardening for most of his life, and his arms have little to no hair, an Ouye family trait that runs in the men's side of the family. He lives in South Pasadena, where Betty drives their Toyota Tundra down to my father's office in Torrance. I still wonder how she can see above the steering wheel while driving that monster of a truck, but it is the only option they have due to Yutaka's "disc problems" in his lower back. It is also not a good sign that she tends to squint at me from ten feet away to distinguish me from my father, who is almost forty years older than me. Only his family calls him by his nickname, "Yuti."

I do not blame Yutaka for not talking to me more often. Our conversations have never been a back and forth, but more of a call and response. He usually reuses the same questions in different order each Monday tran-

sitioning from a sequence of “how’s school?” to “when are you going to graduate?” to “are you still playing basketball?” It is not that I don’t want to talk to him, but rather I do not know very much about him other than that he is my uncle. I even had to ask my father about our relationship to Yutaka during my senior year of high school when I first started working at the office during summer vacations to learn the family business. Before working at the office, my only memories of seeing Yutaka in a different setting were at important milestones in our relatives’ lives like a wedding, or birthday, or funeral. My memories of him always begin with traversing tables. We have only sat together once at the same table at a reception. He and Betty are usually the last people on the list of relatives that my mom and dad remind me to go say hi to, for they are important family members, but just not a standard relative. There one instance that I can remember sitting together at the same table was at my Uncle’s step-daughter’s quinceanera.

One could imagine how out-of-place a table full of Japanese relatives trying to partake in a Latin American tradition looked while surrounded by my step-cousin’s massive group of Latino friends and family. Speeches were told in Spanish first, and I remember watching everyone around me laughing and slapping the table to what I presumed were jokes. Some of the jokes did not translate well into English, so when a bilingual relative translated a joke he would say something like “What’s the most bitter wine? When my mother-in-law came to town. It’s a play-on-words in Spanish so just laugh.” So we laughed, or tried to laugh out of politeness to the relative who probably had no idea how lost we were, and even in the awkwardness of the moment, I do not remember talking to Uncle Yuti very much despite him being one of the few people in the banquet hall that I could talk to.

I came into this assignment excited to finally learn more about my great uncle Yuti, to know more than just the occasional story or fact my father or grandfather would tell. Up until I finally interviewed him, I knew that he had enlisted in the Air Force, the only one of my family members to join the military. I was pretty certain that he was alive during the period of World War II and old enough at the time to know what it was like to be a Japanese American after the attacks on Pearl Harbor. By getting to know

him, I was expecting to learn so much about my cultural history, something I have been neglecting for all these years. Perhaps I would understand why my generation does not typically know Japanese, and why Japanese Americans do not seem to value their history as much as I think they, including myself, should. I sometimes forget that my ancestors were relocated and incarcerated just 60 years ago for being Japanese. Uncle Yuti is my last relative alive and coherent enough to share a glimpse into a primary source account into my cultural history. I was so intrigued that I thought about taking another Japanese language course before I graduate from college. When I called his home in South Pasadena on a Wednesday evening, he was just returning from a doctor's appointment where he received CT scans of his back. I could hear Auntie Betty in the kitchen with food sizzling in the background at times. Yutaka seemed tired, struggling to hear me at times, but he refused my offer to reschedule our interview to a later date when he might be less tired explaining that he does not like to drop commitments. I got used to raising my voice as I situated my question sheet on the desk in front of me.

I had done my homework on this dark period in Japanese and American history. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized Executive Order 9066. The order gave military commanders the power to forcefully relocate and incarcerate almost 120,000 people of Japanese descent, of which sixty percent were American citizens. The last of the camps stayed open until 1946, places my mom's parents endured years of living in horse stables, covered in black tar, a miserable attempt to insulate the insides. Kids supplemented their small, daily rations with dandelions growing an arm's length from the chain link fences in the spring.

Yutaka keeps his responses brief and has a deep and raspy voice, perfect for the Blues. The time it took to ask the general biography questions lasted for what felt like just a few minutes. He was born on August 29, 1933 in Pueblo, Colorado, where he grew up on his family's farm working in the fields. He had 4 siblings, one of which tragically drowned in an irrigation ditch at a young age. To no surprise, his family had always been the only longstanding family of Japanese descent in the area. There were some Japanese families that came and went, but they never seemed to stay long enough to call Pueblo their home.

“So you were born in 1933?” I asked. “So you must have been around eight or nine when Pearl Harbor was attacked?” The transition sounded much better in my head, but as selfish as it was to jump a decade of his life, I wanted Yutaka to get into Japanese American history before he got too tired and hungry. The food sizzling on the other end of the phone even made me hungry.

“Let’s see. December 7, 1941. Yea, I was about eight,” he replied. His words slowed as if he were thinking out loud. Because he paused on the exact date, I figured it must be a sign that this particular event brings back specific memories, sensory details and brushstrokes as they are called in my fiction writing class.

In my research, I found that Pueblo, Colorado was close to two camps, Amache and Topaz. Under the assumption that he had been sent to one of these internment camps, I learned that he never had to experience anytime in any camp.

“Oh, we didn’t go to no internment camps. We were farmers, and everyone needs food, so they just let us be. We weren’t nowhere close to the coast either so they didn’t have to worry about us,” he said. He was 8 years old in February of 1942, farming with his parents in Colorado, and stayed farming there all the way through to 1946.

I looked down at my question sheet again where I had begun drawing big “x’s” on top of more than half of my questions. He and the Ouye family were fortunate enough to be in the forty percent of Japanese Americans who did not have to endure the relocation camps. Fortunate for him, but unfortunate for my assumptions.

To regroup, I asked questions about what it was like being Japanese American in a predominantly white city. As I ran through all my research in my head, I remembered that I had learned much about time in internment camps, but there was not information about those living outside the camps. I imagined that it would not feel very safe in Pueblo at the time.

“Yea, well it’s not like California where you got lots of Orientals everywhere. We stayed on the farm as much as possible unless we went to school.” I had not heard the term oriental used in a while. In fact, I have never heard that word uttered by a Japanese person in this kind of serious context. “We’d hear name calling like ‘Japs’ and ‘Nips,’ but I never felt unsafe.”

Yutaka had told me of the time the FBI showed up at the family farm. I had written an earlier draft of this profile with a section on the family’s encounter.



Uncle Yuti described the time the FBI ransacked their farm house. Two suits insisted on letting themselves in with the local sheriffs to go through their house. The Ouye Family was pushed to the walls of the house, hands ordered to their sides. The men scattered everything and didn't care what fell to the floor. Kitchen ware and family portraits cracked on the clay floors, couch pillows were flung to the ground in search for some evidence that could label the Ouye family as spies. Great Auntie Mayme's doll was stripped of her dress in search of a wire. Their family's broken and old short wave radio put their whole family under suspicion. The four men left with the confiscated radio and the mess on the floor.

The FBI had come to their house, but it was just for questioning. Yutaka translated for his father, who had first worked on the railroads in Colorado before coming into possession of the family farm. His father and mother were both from Hiroshima, but had lost contact with their relatives ever since moving to the U.S. The authorities did ask about the short wave radio, but were satisfied with the excuse that it was broken after inspecting it. They were put under suspicion, but that was probably just the normal protocol at the time. I was working with material that I did not have.

Yutaka didn't have much to say about his thoughts on being a Japanese American during World War II other than the fact that he did not like how "Japanese" the name "Yutaka" sounded. There were no ill feelings towards Japan, nor did he dislike being one of the only Japanese families in Pueblo. The only thing that bothered him was being stuck on the farm. Farm life was hard on him and he never failed to tell me that. He needed a bathroom break in the middle of our interview. While he was away, I decided that Japanese history and identity might be a dead end. The Air Force! I could ask about the Air Force!

"Oh, I enlisted around the end of the Korean War," he said. It sounded like Auntie Betty was placing dishes and silverware on the table. He was the only one in our family to ever go into the military, and he gave me a pretty simple explanation of why he did.

"I got drafted, and I didn't want to get sent to some foxhole and live in some mud, so I enlisted in the Air Force," he replied. He had

enlisted in the Air Force so that it would delay going straight to duty in the Korean War substantially. The Air Force at the time was the best funded branch of the military that avoided water for the most part. "I hate the water, so I didn't want to spend no time on a ship."

He was an aircraft engineer who repaired B29 engines. After basic training, he was sent to Guam in 1955. At twenty-two years old, he was in a squadron tracking hurricane hotspots, acting as human satellites when satellites were not around yet. Because of the nuclear arms race, his squadron was tasked to survey for atomic bombs as well. As interesting as it sounds, I never got him to talk much about the Air Force.

"It was always noisy, damp, and hot," he said to me when describing his conditions in Guam. "Our lockers always had to have a light bulb running in them to keep the damp out. Our bunkers had wet plywood floors and we had to sleep with mosquito nets."

We never spent too long on his time in the army. We would leave the subject sometimes, and I would bring up the topic again hoping to get something out of him. I asked him about his experience tracking typhoons.

"Oh, it was okay. It was too wet to use jets, so we went into walls of water in propeller powered planes. The planes were always shaky and the thunder was loud." As scary as it sounds, fear was not the feeling he got flying into storms.

"Well, I was too busy with my head in an empty ammunition box and throwing up. I was too sick to care about whether I lived or died, so I don't remember too much while I was on the plane."

As I tried to keep the focus on the Air Force, he would always bring it back to farming. As tough as the military sounds, he said, "The army was better than farming." These were his exact words.

His family life seemed to revolve around the farm. All extra energy was put into working the land. He had trouble answering my questions about what kind of older brothers Hershey and my grandpa were like. The majority of our conversations were about life on the farm.

"Well I don't know. We didn't have no time to do too much with each other. We were too busy working on the farm and had school too, you know?" Both of Uncle Yuti's brothers were born in the previous decade. Although they were

closer in age, I still have no memory of Uncle Hershey or my grandpa together and would not consider them close either. I have no memory of them even talking.

“Is there any moment you can remember together? Maybe when you needed help or something?” I asked.

“They never helped me. Them two (Uncle Hershey and Grandpa) always tried to make me and Mayme do all the work. We always got stuck with trimming celery. Worst dang vegetable there is. Bunch of thugs trying to make their baby sister work out in -20 degree weather.” Uncle Yuti replied. He did not have anything nice to say about living on a farm. His parents never talked about Japan or their past too often. He only knew that they were from Hiroshima. “There was too much work to be talking,” he said. “I hated the farm. Mom and Dad had it tough and I don’t think they knew it was a trap.”

He described their house as very small. There were three rooms and a kitchen for a family of six. To make matters even more uncomfortable, one of the rooms was reserved for just potatoes. Sacks and sacks of potatoes. There was no plumbing besides the kitchen sink and all hot water was boiled over the stove fueled by chopped wood or coal. Flash frosts, floods from the nearby river, and hail could all wipe out an entire set of crops for the season. He did not remember a harvest where they made money off the land, so Yutaka and his brothers sometimes held part time jobs, like a Safeway bagger or the local gas station cashier to support the family. They held jobs to support their jobs.

When I began writing my first draft, I found myself adding little white lies everywhere, as if my perception of Yutaka was more important than the man who talked to me. I thought the power of this piece would be carried by grandiose themes and ideas in the form of stories of cultural suffering or war stories. Google could probably return millions of webpages about things related to internment camp stories.

I abandoned my fake draft and went through my notes again. Farming was his family’s life. Everything that was not farming was compared to farming. He couldn’t give me one specific time where all of his family enjoyed free time together because free time meant more time to pick celery or peel potatoes. Someone was always missing if there was picnic, and he could not remember a sibling moment with his brother or sister unless it was about dividing up work. He never

went into specifics unless it was about celery, his least favorite vegetable.

He told me that farming celery is a lost art. “You only see green celery at the supermarkets here,” he said, “Back in Colorado, our celery was golden.” He’d pick them from the dirt with his brother’s hand-me-down gloves, still not thick enough to shield his fingers from the below zero temperatures in the winter. Still, his favorite times of the year were when his brothers outgrew their clothes, for it meant that his wardrobe had just upgraded. He hated celery the most because all but one of the steps of prepping celery to be sold was done outside. Trimming, collecting, and packaging were done in the cold, while only putting celery in crates to be sent to the local supermarket was done in the shed.

I see a lot of places advertising Organic Produce, or Naturally Grown. Many of the people I know who can afford premium produce shop at Trader Joes or Whole Foods, and go to farmers markets on the weekend to get the freshest goods possible and to “support the small farmer.” I have heard that some believe that corporate farming is responsible for making it so difficult to find cheap and healthy produce. More farmers would farm the “right way” without the competition of large profit driven farms. Have these small farm supporters ever stopped to think of it the other way around? Have they ever thought that their “right way” to farm is just too fucking hard and risky? I do enjoy a nice juicy organic apple, but I am thankful that I never had to go through what Yutaka had to go through.



black
dog by
eric
kraft

We demand reasons for suffering. Upon experiencing or witnessing pain we endeavor to understand why it occurred. There is a mundane, practical reason for this--to avoid pain in the future. The process also serves to assure us that all effects have discernable, preventable causes. That events can be grasped, explained, and controlled. It asserts our agency and slakes what Flaubert calls our mania for conclusions. In this way, we can interpret suffering as a "learning experience," to use the cold phrase of so-called "positive" psychologists. Particularly intense forms of suffering can serve to fundamentally rupture our experience of the world. It can estrange us from our loved ones, our beliefs, and our selves. Our faith in the world and our place in it is restored somewhat by believing--rightly or not--that we understand why pain occurs and that we can act to put an end to it.

A depressive episode has its own causes. To some they are obvious. They never have been to me. Time passes. Events occur and life seems comprehensible. But gradually, over the course of several weeks, you become aware of a vague, dark presence bearing down on you from somewhere beyond conscious experience and rational thought. The process is slow at first. It's only later that you find yourself in the grip of the vise. It arises as if from nowhere and in a matter of days it consumes you.

It eats you alive.

In the past depression has nearly destroyed me. It may yet do so in the future. It remains very difficult for me even to describe it--I wrote and re-wrote this text multiple times, and it still feels like a failure. A blind and impotent spasm of writing. To some extent this may be because my powers of expression are feeble. But I bear in mind that William James could only describe depression as "a sort of psychic neuralgia wholly unknown to normal life." William Styron, Andrew Solomon, Julia Kristeva, and Al Alvarez all refer to a similar feeling of speechlessness in their respective analyses and memoirs. To endure it is to walk through a world bereft of any kind of hope or consolation. It cannot be captured in words, and I imagine it's very difficult for someone who has never known depression to see it as something beyond 'feeling blue.' I acknowledge that I, living fairly comfortably in a developed country, have no 'reason' to be depressed and that the paper these

words stain would be put to better use doing innumerable other, more worthwhile things. On a personal level as well, I have always found this kind of emotional exhibitionism distasteful and self-indulgent. And yet I am writing this. I must do so, if only because there is a pain in me that only subsides when I try to capture it. If what I have to say appears self-indulgent, that's because it is. But that does not make it any less necessary for me to say it. Or any less painful to live it.

The looming of depression--the initial disturbed sleepless nights, dulled cognition, and encroaching feelings of abject despair--terrifies you. In this stage it's most obvious that depression is not something that can be beaten by a sunny disposition or sheer force of will. The descent is slow but inevitable. It can be slowed by conscientious effort, but only that. Because--after you return to your empty room

after your friends, family, and doctors have deserted you (and they will)

after your self-serving platitudes evaporate

after your lithium is gone

after your will to resist collapses like a ragdoll

you will be alone in the dark.

You are aware of this from the beginning.

Nonetheless you frantically reach out for some kind of comfort, as if your loved ones were selfless emotional caretakers without their own personal struggles. Odds are that at this point your standards of hygiene and personal conduct have declined to a point where they are disgusted by you. Yet you demand they heal you, console you, somehow give you a stay of execution. You are aware--painfully so--of how much they love you, how much they want to help, how desperately they want to see 'you' again. But there is no word or combination of words that can alleviate your sickness. Their best efforts to do so will be fruitless, and your failure to even comprehend their compassion will sicken you further. The nature of depression is that it makes all expressions of warmth and humanity seem paltry and empty. They have no language with which to speak to you. For those of us who have the luxury, the next course of action is to consult some kind of mental health worker. It's

true that the insights of these men and women can mitigate your suffering. I am convinced that without psychiatric treatment I would not be alive at this moment. But the most a doctor or therapist can do is treat your symptoms. The wound can be cleaned and bandaged, but it will never completely heal. It is somewhere within you, as it always has been and always will be. The wound is bound up so inextricably with you that it permeates your being. It becomes a part of you. You can't imagine yourself without it. It is your closest friend and most intimate companion. To wish for a 'cure' is to wish for suicide (that is exactly why suicide is so enticing). The question is not of finding a cure, but of keeping your illness in check. This is possible. Help is possible. Alleviation of your pain is possible. A life free of your pain is not. This is in some ways the most terrible reality of depression. You will experience moments of joy, even of ecstasy, but during all this you cannot forget for a second that you will one day wake up to find yourself in the abyss.

It will happen again. And again.

It is important to note that, as William Styron says, depression is a form of madness in its extremities--the depressive's ontological grasp on the world weakens and gives way until it becomes unrecognizable to those still living in an ordinary emotional state. The language of the everyday is stripped of meaning. You find yourself living in a world that is unrecognizable. Once the foundations of normal emotional life are undermined the rest of your psyche is quick to collapse. Your anchor in reality

begins

to give away.

Your reaction to all this oscillates between apathetic numbness and piercing terror. The former is a harbinger of things to come. The latter signifies the death of any normal survival instinct. At this point you begin to experience a passive indifference to danger. When you are driving you find yourself tempted to let go of the steering wheel. There is no thrill in this death wish, only a mounting desire for nonexistence.

In its deepest and most ruinous form, depression can only be described as the ceaseless longing for oblivion. Your mind becomes an organ whose pur-

pose is to experience misery. Everyday life is not bearable. Humanity is not recognizable. Consciousness is an impossible burden. Every waking moment is devoted to the lust for death. A soundless voice tempts you to step closer to the precipice.

And as time passes you become certain that's the only solution.

All that's left to do is act.

Sometime around ten o'clock on the morning of April 21st, 2012, I tried to kill myself.

I was a sophomore in high school, on a kind of field trip with a club I joined to pad my resume. We stayed in a hotel in a city in Northern California. There was a nearby theme park which we were supposed to visit that day. I didn't go. I stayed alone in the hotel room. I had spent about three weeks methodically reading every book I could find on the question of whether life was worth living. I told myself I was searching for a reason to live. This was a lie. I had already decided there was none. I sat on the bed and understood this. I calmly wrote a note using the stationary on the desk. I wrote that my suicide was not a cry for help. I wrote that I wanted to die, and then I apologized to my parents and assured them I was no longer in pain. Then I went into the bathroom and swallowed handfuls of every pill I could find. There were three bottles of my antidepressants and two containers of over-the-counter painkillers. I drank most of the bottle of vodka one of my roommates had snuck in his suitcase. I sat on the tiled floor and waited for death. It was a mundane experience. As tedious and unremarkable as waiting for a bus. Having little experience with alcohol, I was unable to keep it all down. I vomited repeatedly. A few moments later I grasped as if for the first time the enormity of what I tried to do. I screamed. I cried so hard I felt I would suffocate. My entire body shuddered. I struck the walls and floor with my fists. I beat the rim of the bathtub with my skull, as if to crack it like an egg. Nobody heard me. I laughed at myself. How pathetic I looked. How miserably I failed. I felt exhausted and empty. Like I had been hollowed out. I returned to the bed and slept for two hours. I awoke and went downstairs to buy lunch. I went back to the room. Later my classmates

returned. Everything was normal. I went to a pharmacy for more medication. The trip continued without incident and I told no one about what had happened when I was alone. After three years my feelings about what I tried to do are unclear to me. Sometimes I laugh. Sometimes I cry. Sometimes I feel nothing and sometimes I feel everything. Much of the time I wish I had done a better job. Other times I am relieved that I didn't. Sometimes the darkness lifts. It is the most wonderful experience in the world to suddenly realize that your capacity to enjoy life has returned to you, if only for a brief time. Things seem bearable. Sunlight, music, art, literature, people—become beautiful again. In these moments I know that despair is not all there is. The idea that I can use my knowledge of emotional desolation to help alleviate it in others, or at the very least compel them to know they aren't alone, has given me a reason to go on. I hope that in writing this I can reach someone who needs to hear that. I can say that depression has made me a far better man, though not a happier one. Snatching this modicum of goodness away from the black dog has given me tentative hope for the future, and solidarity with other sufferers.

And yet

this much is certain--that there hasn't been a single waking hour that's passed since that morning when I have not thought about my suicide attempt. That I remember almost every detail, and with far more clarity than I remember my first kiss or my high school graduation. That night after night I lie awake and think about being on the tiled floor. That it has never left me. Sometimes I think I never left it. Maybe everything since then has just been the last frantic delusion of my dying brain. I think about what it felt like to be so close to a release from living. I think about the things I left out of my note that I should have included. I think about my last breath easing from my lungs...

And in those moments I know this--

it

cant and

wont ever

let go of me.



A silhouette of a person with long hair is centered in the lower half of the image, facing away from the viewer. The background is a vibrant sunset or sunrise sky with horizontal bands of orange, red, and purple. Overlaid on the image are five identical white text strings, 'AR selections', stacked vertically in the upper half.

AR selections
AR selections
AR selections
AR selections
AR selections

f i c t i o n



song of my
parents
by Lauren
franklin

My parents never have been “singers” per se but when I look back on my childhood I swear I can hear them singing. Their song was strongest when they were unaware that they were being watched or heard. In fact, I have come to understand that when I hear a person singing nearby--around the corner, in the next room, or at the stove humming as they go--it is important to be silent. Silence is necessary, because often, when singing people notice that they are being heard or watched, they stop their song. It is important to be silent, despite the quality of the person’s singing voice, because the one thing worse than hearing even a shaky or screechy song is hearing that song stop, abruptly. As a listener, I offer the singing person silence: a space within which to move freely. When interrupted, the gorgeously imperfect human song of a person does not just die, but dies at once. I have found nearly nothing sadder, even uglier, than a vulnerable melody halted.

My parents revealed their songs to me most not in those moments when they were teaching me a lesson or punishing me, but when my small eyes would capture them in their elements, privately engaging in their hobbies or interacting with others. Watching them simply be was a resounding experience, marked by their idiosyncratic cadences, like melodies. Two melodies; separate, isolated from the other.

Well, I suppose there might be one thing more disconcerting than a song interrupted--two songs, drawn out in separate rooms, still yearning for the unity of consonance. At least I yearned for their harmony.

My dad would do small things, would make subtle sounds, and I would watch him. Some--maybe many--Saturday and Sunday mornings, I would curl up against my dad’s body on our blue corduroy couch, a focal point of my childhood. Whispers of *Tom and Jerry* and the chirping chatter of kids’ HBO shows would fill the stagnant air, as my father’s eyes would close and he would unconsciously leave my brothers and me to navigate the cartoon world on our own. His t-shirted chest was my taut pillow, and I would listen to the slumberous life that lived within him, sometimes forgetting the cartoons. I have heard people describe the sound of a heartbeat as a “glugging” or a “whoosh- whoosh,” but my dad’s heart sounded quite different from anything like that. His heart marched, and his chest stayed tight. Something moved beneath the parts of him I could see, and I was mystified. My ear would grow hot against his chest, because I would listen to it beating with such strong intent. My brothers piled around me could not have known, but my routine of doing this was something similar to a discernment about his health. I needed to understand what

was going on inside him. What made him such a big body? What made him sleep so much? Was he really still alive, if his eyes were shut away and there was this banging inside him? The life current that surged through his body as he slept, dormant, on the couch was cause for alarm in my little mind. As he napped with the respiratory vigor of depression surging his chest, I would keep close watch to be sure his heart's ballad endured. My mother must have been upstairs or in the kitchen, somewhere else. I couldn't hear her, and he didn't seem to mind. He slept. His heart marching melancholically, "Ba-boom. Ba-boom. Ba-boom."

In the car, I would hear his music. He played the Stones and the Cranberries and Counting Crows. These are the good sounds of him, the songs of him, that I remember. The windows down added a steadier tempo to our afternoons driving. It could not possibly be true because I was far too young, but I remember myself in the passenger seat next to him. The loosed wind would tear through the space between us, swirling to the rhythms that finally brought my father to life. He would begin, with his hands rattling the dashboard and his thumbs tapping the wheel, to breathe easy. It sounded good. His voice hardly shone through the melodies, but I could capture a murmur of promise in it. His head whipping how I assumed a teenager's would, he would nearly lose himself, and I never loved him more.

My mom's song is different. Her voice has a lyrical quality to it, and I never had to listen for it. It found me. It *longed to be heard*. I would stir in bed on warm nights and hear it chiming through the halls downstairs. There was no whistle more comforting than the sound her mouth would make when she would say any word starting with an 's'. When I heard her chatting with people below, I would see the color yellow. I would see the color of our house. I would curl my body up in my bed. She could not have known, but the sound of her simply talking to a neighbor was a lullaby. I listened close, because it sounded like health and vibrancy and the colors that the house I grew up in like to wear.

I heard her at other times as well. She is a laughter. Weeknights faded into nights on the ribbed blue couch, where we would gather together and giggle in the glow of *Whose Line is it Anyway* and *The Simpsons*. There were jokes I could not comprehend, but I knew they were funny because she laughed. Her mouth would burst awake, and her teeth would shine in the dim light, white and shimmering. Her eyes could not see me, with her mouth taking up most of the space on her face. Sitting next to her on those

nights was a rollercoaster kind of existence. A hush in humorous content, and she would be still. The next moment, she would be made alive!

She also did things that I could not hear. As I grew a bit older, when I could not find her in the house, I knew to turn around the side of the garage and peek in its back door. There she was, in her narrow specs, with her flurried hair falling in her face. Encumbered by her small tools and notes of inspiration, she would craft silver ornaments of faith for people to hang around their necks. If I came closer, I would hear the sound of metal clipping between tiny scissors or the sliding of a chain through a handmade emblem, but I knew not to come closer. She needed space for this particular interlude in her day. Like a hymn, slower and more thoughtful, *nearly unnoticed*. Dada was probably somewhere else, and she sounded sad. Her little tools, cutting back wire and silver. “Clip. [Break.] Clip. [Break.] Clip.”

There were rare occasions when I heard their songs join together. They sounded best when they were hosts. French doors leading to the backyard would be thrown open, and “Blown Open” by Big Wreck, a calm late 90s anthem, would blast through our living room with late afternoon wind. “And I walk out the door / Get blown wide open / By the things I’d put away.” When they invited their friends over for a meal, ironically, their lives were laid bare. His liveliness in music and her ballad of laughter would play. The odd dissonance, the silence everywhere else, those things I could not understand, were blown open for others to see. In the wake of a familiar tune, my parents would come together, and when they would, I knew to watch and be silent. Because it was in the thick throes of these open-door melodies that it almost seemed as if they were in love. It almost seemed as though he noticed her and cherished her; it almost seemed as though she was content in being near him and liked him, too. They sounded so good and whole, humming along together. These were the rare moments for which my heart listened with great intent.



p o e t r y

p o e t r y

p o e t r y

p o e t r y



a l a n a
hollenbaugh

Cabaret Voltaire

Literature is a new language with liquor on my lips
his lectures are litanies to Plath, Lewis, and Longfellow.
Sitting beside the bar at the Cabaret Voltaire
ignoring the dancers' swirl
we debate the poetry of the dark downpour outside.
He sees celebration: swirling puddles of snowdrop petals
illuminated by soft streetlights.
I disagree, telling him
that it is morning-after rain--
trying to wash the dirt from the night still being lived.

It is muddied and lost: streaming frantically through the gutters.

Silence sits heavy in the separation between our thoughts
The band raps rhymes between us: thuds and beats to our meter.
We wander home through the streets, then
with entangled fingers. His alleys are paved with petrichor--
mine are drizzled in cheap beer.

m a r i s a
h a n s o n



ESPRESSO, PLEASE

leaning against a white, sturdy,
white, dirty
balcony

pink dainty daisies dotted
along the concrete

steam rising,
brushing my face.
sip



cameron
edinburgh

Passing Through

Wilted petals, weathered buds:
seek respite in the warm hands that hold you.
Pulled from the pile of fallen leaves,
your brittle cane could no longer support you.

At home an aging partner
cold, shaky hands and no one else.
At home a marble counter
with the stick of crusted strawberry jam.
At home the stacks of magazines
that fill their dining room.
He will not cancel her subscriptions
despite the pleas of an empty stomach.

Pictures of seedlings on the walls—
kids and grandkids that rarely call.
A notepad full of shaky cursive—
their names and relation, lest he forget again.
Soon the lilies of early spring will mourn in the stains they leave
behind.



j a r e d
a m o r y

From “Hostage”

Static from my earpiece
buzzes at the edge of my attention like
A senile mother-in-law inquiring
About the weather.
Walkie-talkie strapped chest,
Bullet proof vest,
Tap-tap, microphone check
FBI letters reflect
light
From my shoulders
As if the sun was trying to escape from my upper
Extremities.

Mile-high-skyscrapers surround me
360-degrees.
Stoic agents stand motionless,
Spaced in twenty-foot intervals
Across lengthy caution tape.

I approach,
Lift the flimsy yellow warning strip and flash
A gold badge.

the car we're
grateful
to have by
Lindsay
Benster





nonfiction

In the midst of my maladroitness, pre-prostrated, middle school years my aunt gifted our family a 2000 Toyota Corolla. Re-gifted from her mother, the car already endured seven years and thousands of miles, defiled by numerous aesthetic and mechanical memories.

Prepensely hidden in the driveway behind a Murano that showered more than most humans and a Tahoma boasting terrain versatility, the Corolla quickly became known within our family as “The Car We’re Grateful To Have”. And that’s all it was to us. A moderately comfortable, semi-attractive car with decent gas mileage, magnifying individual grains crusted on its exterior. On a good day, three fit tolerably; a fourth exposed the deficient legroom- adding a fifth challenged the doors’ ability to close.

Long before the Corolla’s resettlement, Grannie Annie marched into the nearest Toyota dealership, seeking a newborn to occupy the stark vacancy assigned to her unit. She had done her research-- well some research. Actually, the decision arose exclusively from a few interactions with the neighbor residing two buildings over in one direction or another and three or maybe four floors below, or was it two up? Either way his corolla allegedly lit the entire garage and possessed a timeless, perpetual vigor: “It’s the best darned automobile out there,” he claimed. “I ne’er waste a minute fixing her up.” The more words they exchanged, the less substance was discussed. But his unabating passion inspired and directed her impulsive requisite to fill the emptiness. After their third conversation she aimed in the direction of egressing corollas, only stopping upon reaching their mass assemblage. A few short breaths on location and assured opting out of the highly recommended, no insisted, no nearly conditional test-drive; Grannie Annie heartily signed the adoption papers, heedless of the Corolla’s preexisting birth defects. She didn’t need affirmation; for optimistic and trusting served more as epithets than periodic attitudes; large-scale purchases providing the perfect application.

Grannie Annie had loved the Corolla before ever cradling the steering wheel in her arms, before ever kissing the accelerator with her toes.

The kind of maternal affection kindled by anticipation, ripened through considering the Corolla as an exogenous extension of herself. In fact, she only knew love for the Corolla from beyond its doors. As the age of her health and spirit disagreed, she continued to love the car she never knew, from an unfamiliar home, at a distance she couldn't measure.

Aunt Jackie then assumed guardianship, often taking the car to a nearby nursing home, parking so its headlights could see into the windows of the west wing. To her the car was less of a child and more of a propitious mode of transportation, enabling her to forego lengthy winter walks to errands and meetings.

"It's a good car," Aunt Jackie responded to my unspoken hesitation. Normally external characteristics of vehicles only slightly influenced my aptitude to enter, but for some reason the mushroom cloud absconding from the hood diminished my optimism. "Don't worry about the smoke. It's coming from vent above, not the car," she insisted. While I searched for this supposed vent "above", Aunt Jackie popped in the car, glancing over expectingly: "Come on, they close soon!" Gravity operating at several times its normal force, I opened the door. Delicately sitting I buckled my seat belt before locking myself in. We drove off into the darkness, drafting off a blurry cloud taunting the windshield.

I was sick. Not a lingering cold, not a virus, not a bacterial infection; I was sick with a sneak peek of the imminent cardiac malaise to follow. Aunt Jackie drove me away, trying to escape what was to come. Convinced my declining health indicated a friendly suggestion to visit those farther along, I joined Aunt Jackie on a trip to the nursing facility. Overcoming the utmost doubt, the car sure enough delivered us our destination. One turn at a time, one held breath at a time. A nauseated insult overwhelmed my senses from an adverse concoction of the car's smoke that wasn't truly the car's, a temporary immersion into the life of the sweet but dysfunctional, and an ailing condition. From then on I continually associated that offensive sensation with the car.

An intermittently loved foster child tossed from home to apartment to house

to home, the car briefly restituted as the Corolla as my immediate family embraced it (as a favor from Aunt Jackie or for Aunt Jackie, I was never sure), before it officially became the Car We're Grateful to Have. I, an unwelcoming sibling, avoided her if possible. Partially because of my residual symptoms triggered by our prior trauma, and somewhat due to a privileged outlook spoiled by the BMWs, Mercedes and Jaguars monopolizing my affluent environment.

My sparse, forced interactions with the Car We're Grateful to Have ensued for two purposes and two purpose alone: either the Murano and Tahoma had previous engagements, or our destination flirted with high crime. In these specific scenarios, a baseless disdain for The Car We're Grateful To Have inspired my extensive list of synonymous, unjustified justifications for all the vital reasons we shouldn't, no needed to not travel anywhere. While the list dragged on for words, the content did not. It ended where it began, never straying from discomfort. For comfort increasingly intruded into my needs, as the typical progression of gawky pre-teen into normal human adult conjoined with a less typical and somehow more uncomfortable metamorphosis. Bidding a poignant and resistant farewell to health, strength, and fulfillment, I denied any optional opportunity for discomfort, I denied all unnecessary trips.

As my older brother Tyler celebrated his birth for the 16th time, the state granted him a card with his face on it and the governing forces at home endowed a vehicle to use it. After limited deliberation and zero dispute over which car he would drive, The Car We're Grateful To Have was relegated yet again into the trustworthy hands of an infrequently responsible teenager, who's phone spent most of its life hollering from squished couch cushions and masterful in his ability to leave the house unread, arriving at school with profound expertise eight short minutes in the car later. Minimally 6'4" with legs stretching taller than the car itself, Tyler fit less than perfectly within the frame, shrinking in age. He first tried entering the car by leading with both feet, hands gripping the upper frame, pendulating his body to generate enough momentum to swing in his remaining parts. Once achieving the deemed sufficient momentum, he whipped into the car, galvanized

hairs on his scalp grazing the carpeted ceiling. Disregarded in the extreme focus required to execute this physically demanding task, his death grip on the frame failed to release, rebounding his swaying head even faster back through the doorway, effectively ejecting him from the vehicle. The inertia physics promised him existed, proving its loyalty. He next attempted encroaching the mutinous vehicle by discretely crawling through the passenger side, but the center console proved too large an obstacle to overcome. Armless, he reverse wiggled back outside in defeat. Finally settling with placing his right foot on the floor mat, dipping his right shoulder and prying the remaining parts into the vehicle through stabilizing off the steering wheel, Tyler eventually drove away. His knees nuzzling both sides of the steering wheel and his head supplementing as an internal support beam.

Since his knees forcibly rested at the same height as his hands, Tyler occasionally would leg-lock the steering wheel at the desired angle so his hands were free for much more important tasks, such as opening water bottles or biting into breakfast. Occasionally quickly transformed into habitually, as his knee-driving advanced to include sharp turns, wide turns and quick swerves avoiding rogue squirrels. On our carpooling days he would drive with his knees, I would sit eyes closed, hands clasped in front of my chest.

One ordinary, overcast Seattle afternoon Tyler drove a few of his equally giant and gangly friends home from swim practice on a mission to refuel their stomachs, but never the gas tank. Mom and I stood in the driveway, washing the Murano with an assortment of ShamWow!s since the hose was far too harsh. Well she scrubbed the car, and I pretended as her vision neared mine. A loud clash of metal on metal interrupted our intense deep-cleaning session, and we shifted our eyes to its source. And there it was, The Car We're Grateful to Have in a perpetual state of bottoming-out. Windows down, with more limbs than people dangling out of the car (creating space for at least their torsos), the swim crew teetered into the driveway. Tyler parked, and after a few seconds brainstorming the succeeding exit process, he called out for assistance. I walked over and immediately swung the door open, not realizing the



dam I had destroyed nor anticipating the flood of tangled bodies pouring out.

“Tyler, the circus called it wants its clown car back” one of his friends japed. Thus, The Car We’re Grateful To Have became The Clown Car. All too quickly, Tyler tossed his tassel, venturing off to the East Coast seeking more letters to his name and more wealth to his intellectual bank. Shortly after, Dad bestowed the keys upon my regretfully unappreciative hands, informing me: “It’s yours as long as you take care of it”, with a tone reverberating an encyclopedia of cautionary tales. And thus, The Clown Car met its fifth generation owner; however, only with conditional access. The notion that I would drive myself to and from appointments, school, and the practices I could no longer participate in constrained my accessibility. But I had a car, or could borrow a car, and that was something.

Inserting the key into the ignition the Clown Car’s transformer hummed, and so did mine. A bi-fold emotional reaction evoked within me upon receiving the gift: I’m grateful for the transportation, I’m grateful for the transportation, became a reflexive mantra triggered by sight of the Clown Car. But uncertain of self-identity and lacking confidence, driving the “cheap” car to school exacerbated my numerous insecurities. Shallow. Shallow I know, but effortlessly validated through adolescent reasoning and impractical social expectation.

Though a constant center of mockery, The Clown Car unpredictably started redeeming our haunting memories. We began spending mass amounts of time together, initially with necessary trips to school or doctors. Over time I began leaving 10 minutes early for appointments so I could drive her around the block just one extra time. Soon enough I took pointless trips altogether, driving aimlessly, winding through the sinuous roads of West Mercer, or cutting across the one-ways of Seattle. Music always blaring, with no particular destination in mind. Driving gradually formed into my most consistent coping mechanism- my coping with the standard stress of school, relationships, and sports. My coping with the less age-appropriate grieving from the loss of my academic excellence, my social aptitude,

and my athletic finesse. My coping with the rare heart condition plaguing my success, consequential depression, and subsequent self-alienation. The Clown Car became my metaphysical and physical vehicle of support.

From the numerous missed turns followed by quick and questionably legal U-turns I began to realize her turning radius was surprisingly acute. Cruising frivolously about Seattle, blasting music until my ears echoed the melodies for several minutes after the engine cut, I concluded that the sound system was actually notably ample. Slipping into narrow, white lines I discovered parallel parking, perpendicular parking, whichever direction I wanted to park really could be accommodated with her ideal size.

My swelling appreciation for The Clown Car seemed inversely related to my worsening physical and mental state. Fittingly, as The Clown Car's name-changing history portrayed a deeper fondness with each accumulating memory, the next name change seemed laggard. I renamed The Clown Car, Maria. A nice name. Nothing outstanding, nothing strange. Not horrible, but not spectacular. A beautifully average name. A name comically and ironically average, but more flattering at least than The Clown Car, or The Car We're Grateful To Have.

Driving to school on an aberrantly sun-drenched morning, a burst of epiphany ruptured through Maria, penetrating my shattered spirit. As the illness utterly obstructed my life's steering wheel, I barreled blind and unconscious into opposing traffic. A sea-foam blue Lexus of realization and appreciation hit me: I loved her. I did not loathe Maria. I loved Maria. I loved Maria and I loved everything about her. I loved the memories she created from cramming as many kids in as possible; I loved the incessant ridicule of her faulty appearance, the unexpectedly invaluable speakers pulsing within, the vivacity she activated in all passengers. I loved the connection she provided me to my late grandmother; the bonding she enforced upon my family by confinement. I loved how she always located the perfect parking spot only she could fill; that she took me where I wanted to go whenever I wanted to go there. Mostly, I loved that she gave me control in a life dictated by

inescapable circumstances. She let me decide left or right, right or wrong.

The Lexus drove away, the driver unscathed, the car inconsequentially altered. I watched the back end of my recent past abandon me at the biggest intersection leading forward. Facing my Maria, I looked at her, unblinded for the first time. Her front bumper sagged, two hubcaps lined one side but not the other, her right blinker bled glass tears and remnants of a bulb shadowed a collection of shards laying before it. She had lost consciousness. She had crashed. Far too long she had worn scars of emotional distress and chronic failure, and championed internal mechanical dysfunctions even behind the aesthetic blemishes. Whether she was me, or I was her I didn't know; but she embodied my transition to disbanding baneful judgments of others, my ripening to not only accepting, but truly appreciating various disregarded aspects of my life, regardless of societal standards. My recognition that I was not okay, but I would be okay, and if not that would be okay too. She was my cipher, my carbon copy.

When I came to in this significant collision of life's forces, I came to revived. Maybe it was the horrific thought that Maria could possibly be totaled. Or perhaps the sheer terror of losing control over the one vehicle of power I could always rely on. Whichever the underlying reason was, I awoke with hope. If Maria, my middle-aged car could still function after a significantly damaging collision, why couldn't I? If The Clown Car, constantly mocked but furtively cherished could drive unaffected by offensive gibes, or precarious decisions, why couldn't I? If The Car We're Grateful To Have could be the most reliable car we owned despite it's cheap background and inauspicious stats, why couldn't I rise as well?

I walked over to the driver's side, creaked open her shifted frame and sat down. Slipping the key into the ignition I gently twisted, listening to the song of her engine, the rhythm of her distorted blinkers. Carefully checking my surroundings, I pulled onto the street. Looking back through her rear view mirror my eyes momentarily clung to an abandoned pile of broken pieces. Turning left, I exposed her wounded side to the open road, feeling a new breeze through the bent window.

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thank
| you

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