

Haute Dish is published two times a year, spring and fall semesters, and is dedicated to showcasing the literary and artistic talents of students, staff, faculty, and alumni of Metropolitan State University.

Categories include Poetry, Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Memoir/Personal Essay, Visual Art (Photography, Illustration, Focus on Metro), and Digital Storytelling.

Who May Submit? Current students, staff, faculty and alumni of Metropolitan State University are all welcome to submit their work for both the Fall and Spring issues.

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HAUCE DISH

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The Harvesting of the Forest Moon

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EDITOR'S LETTER

As an international student of the Metropolitan State University, it is a privilege to be part of a team where I can grow as a person while giving back to others at the same time. Haute Dish was presented to me as a unique, diverse, and inclusive collegiate community of students, alumni, staff, and faculty, where scholars from different backgrounds and experiences are welcome to express themselves through art and literature

As the Managing Editor for Haute Dish, I would like to especially thank all of the contributors whose work is being published in this edition. Your work is important and it can make an impact on society as a whole. Thank you to my predecessor, Tessa Gedatus, for her hard work and support. And, thank you to our faculty advisor, Suzanne Nielsen, your expertise has made Haute Dish a smashing success. To the editors and volunteers, I cannot thank you enough for all the effort and time you put into this issue. This publication would not be possible without your help.

Finally, I want to thank you. To those of you who read our magazine regularly: without you, the effort would be for naught.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gina Torres". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Gina" and "Torres" being significantly larger and more decorative than the rest of the letters.

Gina Torres
Managing Editor

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SUMMER SKIRMISHES

Hawo Jama

She is skinned knees and
Red cheeks, a blow
To her chest when
She didn't see and
Her mouth forms the
Word "Mom!" before
Anyone even knows
She's gone.

A PIECE FROM THE HEART

Leylo Boru

Some people thought that I will not comprehend so they paraphrased it for me

Some thought that I won't be able to excel so they advised me against giving it my best

Some thought that I was oppressed and wasn't allowed to learn

But let me clear the misconceptions up

It's not that I do not comprehend, but it's that I have a language barrier

It's not that I won't be able to excel but it's, in fact, my personal duty to give it my all

It's not that I am oppressed but it's that I am mandated to seek knowledge before anything else, but unfortunately, most of us failed to act upon it

They laughed at me when I couldn't pronounce one word out of a hundred, but they failed to pronounce one word out of one in my native tongue

It gives me goosebumps when people are busy at the flaws of others and are unaware of their own

They looked at me and signaled to me that I do not belong, but they are not the ones to decide whether I belong or not, but my efforts.

They looked down upon me and my origin and expected me to do the same to myself, but too bad 'cause I am always me and work hard to make me into a better person, not into the person they expect me to be

They have connections to help them go through the loops easier, but I do not worry as long as I have connections with the most high 'cause He only says be and it does!

Listen dear schoolmates 'cause I am not only about me but about you too

I am not giving us excuses to not try to seek perfection in a language that may not be our first, second or even third

Am not trying to tell us to relax 'cause we are good at many other things

I am just telling you and I that we should appreciate ourselves and what we have accomplished so far, and not let this be the end of our journey

Let's not expect anyone else to appreciate our efforts other than ourselves 'cause it ain't gonna happen in reality

Let's not give in to their ill expectations but rather give into the expectations we expect out of ourselves deep down in our hearts

Remember, tomorrow when we fall, no one will lift us up if we are not willing to lift ourselves up first.

What I am saying is, let's build our bases so that we are strong enough to dodge any storm that will come our way

And this is to my professor Tonia Baxter: Your non-verbals matched your verbals correctly. I mean you are not one of those that pretend but one of those that really care. Finding the likes of you is really rare, so I appreciate your efforts and the time you put into each and every one of us.

SHAMANIC RITUAL

Danielle Staiert

We sit in a room toe-to-toe talking around the heavy unsaid. Medicine Woman asks me again to express the razor teeth thoughts behind the grief.

I tell her I don't know. Because I don't.

I ask for a scalpel, timid with the taste of a white mouse, so I can split my chest from sternum to voice box where the pressure pushes back. Each rib snaps its zip tie, turning a cavern inside-out where charcoal butterflies float down on gravity.

Could she not hear the ash whispering the answers as the dust settled from the wings? I rip the gap open wider and deeper for her, sending my entrails clattering between us. Brittle bones and clay organs fired in the heavy unsaid, scatter and settle on the light gray carpet in the room with oils and couches and a zebra at the top of the stairs.

Lighten up, she says.

So we dance around the circled colors of viscera and we hear the clacking of our teeth tumbling in the bowl of our skulls with pretty nails of fingers rattling in our gourds. Our shamanic ritual deepens the sea, waves spiraling through our hollow bones. In her headdress of white, feathers plume in halos, swaying to the movement of music, soft as the golden spray of chimes.

Our eyes disappear with the ticking hour. The bones keep their secrets from our trance of why the ribbons of sinew wrap a noose around my lungs, why my finger bone, gnarled from a wound not quite set right, pokes holes in a toxic tongue that releases a bitter penny taste. And how we can no longer reach my skeleton I laid to rest in the creek bed behind my house.

Medicine Woman challenges me to open my hands, to let go of the little heart I cradle still gasping and still calling for the diamond butterflies that suffocated under my bedsheets and bruises a lifetime ago.

OUR ANCESTRAL CALL

Denise Williams

We gather here in this Great Hall of learning
To light our torch to the blazing fire of knowledge
Some serve as fire-keepers or igniters
Others as the midwife, transferring seeds of wisdom
Many are travelers on the path of becoming

Whether nurturing, witnessing, or responding to this call
We all draw something necessary for our evolution
We each rise to the best of ourselves
As we learn and give of our unique essence
Each essential to the alchemical elixir

As we break-down, break-through, and break-open
We are the best of our bloodlines
This rainbow of collective consciousness and purpose
Streams of diverse heritages
Collecting in one great ocean

Together we co-create a more beautiful tomorrow
We dance, flow, and fight for a more just today
Let your lights shine bright
Knowing that every breath is a new opportunity
Every day moves us toward our dreams

In every battle of mind, soul, and being
We are living in our “date with destiny”
Let us celebrate together as we answer the call
And honor the shoulders of those on which we stand
Shouting YES to our birthrights to Greatness!

I ONCE DREAMT OF SUCCESS

Peter Lindstrom

“I ascended a steep hill and came upon a jungle gym. I looked back and the clown was still there. I was not outdistancing him, he was gaining on me. There was a forest ahead, I could maybe elude him in there. But I stopped suddenly. I turned around and ran full tilt at the clown with the clear intention to tackle it. Where menace was previously, was replaced with sheer terror on the clown’s face. He turned and started running from me. Then, I awoke”

“Well, did you catch the clown?” I asked.

James ruffled his nose as he outburst, “No, no, I’ve told you...” but then his face softened as he saw that I was giving him a hard time. “...a million times that it is extremely rare for a person to catch what they are chasing in dreams.”

“I caught an alligator in a butterfly net,” I said.

A smirk crossed his face as he said, “Precisely! It’s not impossible, but it is rare. And my point is: don’t ask if the thing was caught, you act disappointed every time it isn’t.”

“I am, to tell you truthfully. I like happy endings.”

“The transformation in that story is the happy ending. I was afraid, and I confronted my fear.”

“But that’s not the ending dear, you kept on chasing that clown.”

I met James in college. He was the same then as he is now, endlessly ambitious. He had one driving force that was pushing him. Dreams. It was the subject of the first conversation we ever had. I found the conversation a pleasant novelty, never having had a conversation with a stranger that revolved around

ducks that transformed into people and the balloon animals at the circus coming to life and devouring little children. This was new to me, but I soon found out that dreams were the first conversation he had with most people he encountered. James had another quirk. He was terrified of not being remembered. Unnaturally so. I nearly broke up with him when I found out how deep this terror filled his being and motivated a lot of his actions. But we all have our demons. And there was a story behind his fear, which at least partially redeems his neuroticism.

James was very close with his grandfather Ollie. Ollie worked 25 years at the Ford motor company. He was one of those hired on opening day as a general laborer and worked himself up to be one of the top engineers at the company. On the day he retired he was presented with a plaque for his achievement. Henry Ford personally handed it out.

“Thank you for your contributions, sir. I’m sorry, I’m blanking on your name. What is it?”

Ollie walked straight out of his own retirement party. Ollie was forever bitter afterward. It poisoned him deep in the well of his soul.

“I spent my life laboring for that man. I never let the rooster catch me in bed. I was in the drawing room every morning when I heard that darn thing cock-a-doodle-doo. Apparently, I wasn’t worth remembering. He stole my pride in a single moment. Don’t work for other people, James.” James drew a slightly different conclusion from his grandfather’s story. He knew that history was replete with small business owners who weren’t remembered. James

wanted to force people to remember him through success that could not be ignored.

The path he chose to confront this fear was academic success. His intelligence and single minded drivenness served him well. He worked his way up to become the chair of the sleep studies department at Harvard University.

Some people thought he was self-absorbed because of his ego. But his curiosity in other people was of such intensity that it was impossible to call him self-absorbed if you spent more than a few minutes around him. James was endlessly fascinated in other people's inner lives. I've never met a person who has been so inured to small talk. To tell the truth, he often was averse to deep talk as well. He wanted to know every person at the level of their soul. And he believed a lot of language was used to obfuscate what was really going on inside. His research taught him that the conscious mind is the tip of the iceberg. The unconscious is a murky pool, but it's where you find their soul. People strain over the fact that people act in contradictory ways. They say they want one thing, but then the arrow of their life points in a different direction. James wasn't consternated by that. He thought it was almost inevitable. And his belief, was that dreams were the best avenue to get to the unconscious. It was the first day of the semester and each footstep echoed as I walked up to the front of the classroom. I looked out at my class full of fresh faces. If I was like most professors, I would spend 30 minutes introducing the class to what would happen during the semester in this Psychology 101 class. No preamble for me though; I prefer diving straight in with a story. "A railroad worker looked over his right shoulder as he was tamping a blast site preparing to explode some rock out of the way for the railroad. Through

carelessness or maybe just bad luck, a spark was caused prematurely and a three and half foot iron rod shot out and traveled straight through his skull. He miraculously survived. The doctor reported that he vomited up half of a "tea cup" of brain. As much as I want to believe it, this brain vomit is possibly apocryphal. But what isn't apocryphal is the radical shift in this man's behavior. A conscientious and kind man was turned overnight into a surly and impulsive person. The man of gentle spirit was suddenly cussing everyone out. His name was Phineas Gage. The gaping hole in his frontal lobe radically altered his personality and how we looked at the different functions of portions of the brain. His lack, caused the ability for us to see what was."

Phineas Gage was an important person in brain science. I was interested in him because psychology professors are required to. James was interested in him by way of analogy. Everybody dreams, even those people who say they don't remember them. With one exception. The brain activity of survivors of strokes indicate that they cease to dream at all after their stroke. There was not a single stroke survivor who has claimed they have had a dream post-stroke.

James believed that people who had suffered a stroke were the Phineas Gage of sleep science. But there was a problem of a lack of data. There were very few who had suffered strokes who performed sleep studies. And there was no way to verify whether their lack of dreams was not a predilection they already had. One woman who suffered a stroke said that she remembered vivid dreams every night until she had a stroke and then never remembered a single dream afterwards. But science cannot be built on the sandy shores of anecdotal stories. Hard data, before and after, was needed.

I ONCE DREAMT OF SUCCESS

Peter Lindstrom

After class was over, I walked over to the sleep studies department and found James in the hallway talking to Professor Coledridge.

“People lie. Not just to other people, but to themselves,” said James.

I tried not to show my impatience, but I saw James’ eyes dart to the nervous twitch that my elbow does when I am ready to move on.

“Alright Coledridge, it looks like we will need to finish this conversation later, my wife is ready to go,” James said with a chuckle and a pat on Professor Coleridge’s back.

The man-made pond at the center of campus was still and tranquil as we walked past it.

“James, I heard that you are asking more people around the Biology department about how to chemically induce a stroke,” I asked.

James blushed. “They are only questions.”

“No! That is unethical on so many grounds!”

“I’m not saying I will cross any of those grounds! I’m just exploring options. Maybe a situation will come up where a person will volunteer.” I shot him my most evil looking glare. Several years ago, he brought up the idea of taking terminally ill cancer patients and seeing if a volunteer would let them induce a stroke for the sake of science. I told him that I loved him, but that I would divorce him if he ever did something so horrific. I never heard another word about it after that. I assumed that had been enough for him to banish the thought. Apparently, it wasn’t.

“Fine, I’ll drop it,” said James.

Two months later, I was getting a haircut when my phone started buzzing. I couldn’t answer it at the moment, I was getting a haircut. But after I paid my stylist, I checked my voice mail. James was in the hospital. I walked into the hospital room and saw a room with friends, family, and Professor Coleridge from the Biology Department. Coleridge shot me a mournful look. I saw James’s stiff face and a breathing apparatus set up next to him.

“James, you damned fool!” I cried while I began sobbing and crumpled in to a heap on the floor.

Several friends and family members got on the ground and tried to console me. The hugs I received felt like they came from manikins.

I heard the words, “He’s not dead. But he’s in a severe coma.”

I already knew that, I thought coldly. I almost would have preferred it if he were dead, with how angry I was. Anger turned to sadness. Sadness turned to numbness. I didn’t move. God knows how long I was there, but eventually I was there all alone on the floor in the dark. A nurse walked into the room and handed me a half crumpled piece of paper. She said that she waited until everybody else had left to give this to me.

“This was in James’s left breast pocket,” said the nurse.

I opened the piece of paper and found the following scribbled in black ink:

“Nobody remembers the scientist who discovered him, but everybody remembers Phineas Gage.”

SUNSET MAUL

Mai Lee—Photography



MELBOURNE STAR

Maggie Dyslin—Photography



NOTHING MORE

Megan Bauer

I live in a town
Where everyone rushes to church on Sunday morning,
But once 61 minutes have passed
They walk right out.
Their hour obligation has been fulfilled
To call themselves righteous.

The old men act like overtime in a holy place
Is a sin itself
As they remark,
“He sure knows how to drag it out.”

Surely these old folks
Have never been to a Spanish Mass
Where the pastor preaches for hours
And soft stringed guitars play.

The people here don't sing.
They sit in their pews watching their watches.
They pass the offering basket
Without dropping a dime.
They don't feel obliged.

The same crowd pours into the local McDonald's
At 5 am everyday
To sit in circles of gossip
And get unlimited refills on 70 cent coffee.
They bring in their own syrup for 2 dollar hotcakes
And stay for hours
Complaining about the ways of the world.

Maybe it's like this everywhere.
But I often feel like I am living in an odd bubble of the world
Where life is viewed in terms of obligations, routine,
Pinching pennies, and nothing more.

Pranayama

Danielle Staiert

Breathe. In. Out.

Feet press into the sand, sinking
in cool comfort as it gives way.
Midnight tide flows in, its swell
cresting the soft earth.

The ocean's foam honey-combs our footprints,
in a quiet hush over the grooves.
Dancing shadows sway under moonlight
veiling a crisp, sweet wideness
of depths below.

There are no footprints in the morning
for a breath leaves no trace.
I am the ocean's sigh, the ember's exhale,

The breath
in the hum of the sun's rising.

EUROPE 2017

Katherine Pemberton—Photography



CROSSING THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

Melissa Gillman

The sunlight streamed through the windows of the waiting room. She nervously sat along the outer wall, her mind racing. Her vacation was in two days, and she had so many things she couldn't wait to tell people. The nurse called her name and led her down the hall to an imaging room. It was the same one she had sat in almost three months ago; the last time she was there. She hoped for good news.

"Everything looks normal," the doctor said during her eight week ultrasound. "But I just can't find the embryo."

"Well, I know I'm pregnant," she responded.

"And you are," the doctor replied. "There isn't an embryo here. I'm going to have to check your tubes."

She ran through a dozen different scenarios in that minute, trying to avoid the screen.

"I found it!" the doctor exclaimed.

She jerked her head towards the screen to her right. The doctor had found it; millimeters away from where it needed to be and her heart sank.

"I'm sorry. It's not a viable pregnancy."

The waiting room of the doctor's office was the busiest she had ever seen. The receptionist seemed to anticipate her arrival, and she didn't even have to say anything. As she and her husband sat down to fill out paperwork, pregnant women seemed to surround her from every angle. Her eyes finally blurred, from both tears and exhaustion and she left the paperwork abandoned until the gynecologist called her name.

His office was small, nothing more than a desk, a bed and a few chairs, but multiple degrees decorated his walls.

"How are you feeling?" he asked with genuine concern.

"Not...great," she fought back tears. "I wish I was here under different circumstances."

"Me too. You know what you have?"

She nodded her head, silently allowing herself to succumb to the sadness and words finally having failed her. Her husband, unable to say anything, shook his head.

"This pregnancy is ectopic," the doctor began. "It's what happens when the zygote begins to develop in the Fallopian tube instead of the uterus."

"Is there any way it could develop normally?" he finally asked, hand resting lightly on his wife's knee to show his support.

"No."

Her husband turned pale.

"There is no way to save this."

"Ok..." his voice cracked. "Shit."

All three sat in silence for several moments before the doctor spoke again.

"I am sorry, but I'm going to have to ask you to step out of the room for a few minutes. I have to give an exam."

"I don't know why," she said with heavy bitterness in her voice. "We already know I'm pregnant."

They both chuckled nervously.

After several minutes, he was called back in.

“Everything’s in order, but the clinic hasn’t sent the files yet. We can’t release you to the hospital until we get the go ahead from them.”

“Well, they close at three and it’s almost three now. I can’t imagine they’ll rush to send this today. She’s not even my real doctor.”

The bitterness was threatening to consume her and the doctor slid his chair forward. He delicately set his hand lightly on her knee. She noticed and she followed the movement with her eyes. His face was calm but his voice was soft.

“Hey...I know this is a difficult time, but Dr. Casey was adamant that you receive the best care we can offer during this time. She called me directly. Not the nurse line. Not the main clinic. Her own personal line. She is extremely upset that this happened. She wants to make sure that today goes as stress free as it can. Once they call, I’ll set you up an appointment at the hospital across the street. You should have a few hours to yourself. Why don’t you take some time to relax. There’s a mall across the street, or the Subway or Caribou located in this building, if you’re hungry. Both offer fairly relaxing atmospheres. I’ll call you when I’ve scheduled the appointment. I’m very sorry we had to meet under these circumstances. Best wishes for the future.”

They did neither of those things. They drove home instead. The radio played something Indie. Even that was too happy, and she shut it off. The sun stung her eyes.

“Let’s get a head start on our vacation,” she announced.

“Hmmm?” He was lost in thought.

“We were going to leave on Saturday, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Why don’t we leave tomorrow? I already have today and tomorrow off. Today’s shit, so why don’t we start our vacation a day early and get away from all this?”

“That sounds like a great idea.”

It was the first time either of them smiled in several days, and it surprised them how good it felt.

The drive back to the hospital was as quiet as the trip home. The shot to break up the failed pregnancy was to be given in an area of the hospital just down the hall from where happy mothers were staying and the irony was not lost on them. The shot—methotrexate, an almost obsolete method of cancer treatment was a two person job to administer. A huge dosage for a huge job. The lists of what one couldn’t do while on it was lengthy: no alcohol, no vitamin supplements except when absolutely necessary, nothing with folic acid in it because that would encourage growth. After the shot was administered, she was to see a doctor every two days for the next two weeks to make sure her numbers went down. If everything went well, she’d only need one shot. What they didn’t tell her is the numbers would keep climbing several days after the shot, before they would begin to take a nosedive.

The part of the hospital she was in was quiet. She and her husband and the nurses were the only ones there. There were only two large rooms, each with two beds, a shared closet and tv.

“Welcome to the MAC,” the nurse said. “ We’re sorry to see you like this. We’d love to get you on

CROSSING THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

Melissa Gillman

your way, but the pharmacy has to make this shot, and there's a bit of a wait. You are welcome to watch tv or visit the waiting room where there are vending machines. The wait shouldn't be longer than an hour."

She was content to sit on the bed and stare at the wall. She contemplated if things were different; if she were just down the hall, how much better things would be. Her husband searched through the tv channels, looking through the garbage fire of daytime television for something to catch his eye and distract him from his thoughts.

The book she brought from home sat on her lap, unread while her phone blew up with questions pertaining to the day. She answered them all until her phone died and then she went back to staring at the wall. The same nurse from before entered the room.

"Are we ready?" she asked. "I'd really like to just get this over with."

"We heard back from the pharmacy. I'm sorry, but it's going to be at least another twenty minutes."

"Fine."

The nurse left and they were left to the silence. Usually she would talk the ear off anyone who would listen, especially in times like this, when stress was high. Her husband was the quiet one, but he was the one who started asking questions, to hide from the impending finality.

"We were so close, y'know? So damn close. It worked this time!"

"I don't want to talk right now."

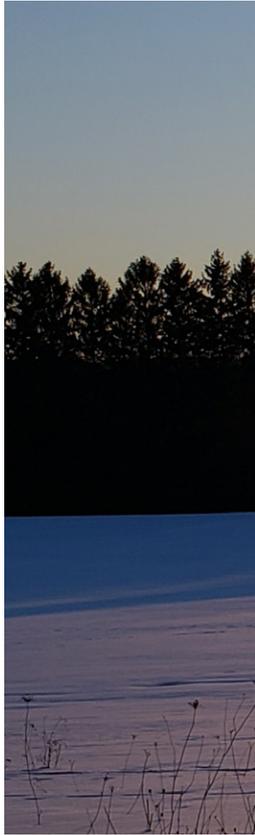
"...Sorry."

A short time later, the same nurse came back, this time accompanied by another older nurse. She looked like someone's grandmother, pleasant and full of stories.

"It's time. This is Julie," she pointed to the grandmotherly nurse. "She's going to be giving you the other shot with me at the same time. After we've given you the shot, you'll need to stay here for another twenty to thirty minutes and then you can leave. You can lean over the bed if you can, otherwise, this nightstand is also a good height."

They counted down from three and it was done. The next half hour was spent in gross sobs, mourning the child she'd never know. The nurse came back and held her in an embrace as the sobs wracked her body. She was unable to speak and unable to feel anything except mourning and longing for something she'd never have.

Just down the hall, happy families were being made.



MARCELLUS SUNSET

Emilie Peck—Photography



EVIL STEPMOTHER

Carlyn Crouse

I married a man with more money than personality, but that isn't to say we ever had money. Looking back, I can't recall a time our relationship ever resembled love.

His daughter was a different story. Sarah was the sweetest girl I'd ever met. I loved her since the first smile she darted my way. Her light blue eyes were as sharp as the ice dams that coated the side of our one-story house during the winter. It was she who taught me to wear long sleeves and turtlenecks.

It didn't take long for us to become inseparable. We were safe with one another. He dared not touch either of us when the other was around, like it mattered. We never spoke about it either. We simply played princess on my days off while he was passed out drunk on the couch, dead to the world. Sarah's favorite story was Cinderella. I'd joke about being the evil stepmother, and even played the part in our daily games.

It took months, but after working little by little, day by day, I was able to gather enough scrap fabric to sew a gown for Sarah, just like Cinderella's. It was a patchwork of varying blues and whites sewn together at odd angles, but she loved it. She wore it everywhere and when her father would rip it, we'd quickly mend it back together.

No longer able to stomach his hands on my bruised skin, I knew I couldn't stay. After Sarah turned eight, I forced myself to believe she was old enough to be okay without me. I almost convinced myself, except when she looked at me with such innocence and longing.

"But Mom, Cinderella stays with her stepmother." Her icy eyes began to pool in the corners and drip down her rosy cheeks.

"It's not that simple, princess. And besides, Cinderella doesn't even like her stepmother. They are forced to be together after her father passed away." A smile returned to Sarah's small, confused face for a moment. She always loved when I called her princess.

"My other mom left me too. She's with the angels now." Her words latched on to my heart and twisted towards my gut where I attempted to seal them away.

"I know, sweetheart." I bit my lower lip to wall off the burning tears welling behind my eyes. "But I can't stay here anymore. And I'm not ready to visit the angels."

When I arrived later that afternoon to collect the last of my things, Sarah opened the door to greet me, smiling from ear to ear. My heart stopped when I looked down at her chilling blue eyes reflecting the sunlight off the nearby ice dams.

"Now we can have our happily ever after."

Her words escaped me. All I could hear was pressure pounding in my ears as I looked down at her patchwork blue gown coated in thick, scarlet blood.

MUSHROOM

Maggie Dyslin—Photography



OLD REGRETS ABOUT PAST FRIENDS

Catherine Levine

I'm sorry. Really, I am.

I don't ask for forgiveness because what is that?

It's not a thing you can ask for.

Maybe it can be given but

I can't ask for forgiveness any more
than I can ask you for rainbows.

Probably, you've long ago moved on.

Hopefully, any hurt I left has faded.

It's doubtful you're lying awake at night
thinking about me, like I am you.

I was a messed-up kid and you were a messed-up kid

your pile of pain was too much for me

mine, so carefully cloaked.

I'm sorry I treated you badly

There was no light inside of me to shine,

no skills to use,

no adult to ask,

no home to go to.

I was just better at pretending I was fine.

Recently, I saw your friend at the play-park
toddler-chasing.

Even after twenty years she knew me,

knew enough to scowl and

ply her child to a new direction,

away from mean me.

She is a good friend.

Better than I can be.

Better because I'm sorry but I'm not sad.

DRAWING ATTRIBUTES

Elizabeth Wadsworth Ellis—Focus on Metro



PARADISE OF BODIES, SAME AS EVERYWHERE

Hawo Jama

Somehow Roble managed to convince Sabrina to tag along. He said it would be fun, an adventure even. And though she rolled her eyes at him, she let herself be roped into his evening plans anyway. It was a Saturday night in the middle of the bleakest winter of their lifetime. Had it been a normal weekend, Sabrina would have spent it wrapped up in her covers, cocoon-style, with only her eyes showing so she could binge-watch some Netflix. Instead she was teetering on the tallest and thinnest heels she owned, following too closely behind her friend. After what felt like hours of walking, the club appeared before them like a lighthouse in the middle of a storm. It was an otherwise ordinary two-story building, nondescript in its blandness, hanging off the corner like some abandoned child waiting for her mother. There were groups of men huddled before it, some in revealing outfits, tight shirts showing a mix of six packs and round, hairy bellies. Sabrina and Roble looked downright overdressed in comparison with their bubble jackets and choice of pants (jeans for Roble, leggings for Sabrina). When they finally fought their way inside, the club exploded with color and music and sweaty, sweaty bodies. It was as if someone had captured Florida and let it loose inside. Lights in every color bounced off the black walls and swirled into the

ceilings. Save for the few circles of women dressed in gaudy bachelorette attire, the club was filled with nothing but men.

“I can’t believe I let you talk me into this,” Sabrina complained, her jaw snapping each word out as she began to thaw in the heat of the club.

“Shut up,” Roble said. “Like you would’ve been busy doing anything else tonight.”

“I had plans.” Sabrina turned up her nose.

“What plans?”

“Netflix and Chill.”

“With whom? Your cats?”

“Shuddup!” she mumbled while shoving his shoulder. Roble nearly tripped and fell into the thin man before him.

This was their relationship in a nutshell.

Roble was always in the lead, bravely marching forward into new experiences while dragging a reluctant Sabrina behind him. She knew she should have been more grateful to him. Sabrina wouldn’t have tried half of the things she ended up doing had it not been for him, after all. At sixteen, she had managed to get a drink at a real bar (fake ID), travelled across state lines (without her parents’ knowledge), and snuck out to see a show. Now

that one, she didn't care for. The band was more punk than pop, but she was just glad to be there and head-bang alongside her best friend. In two years, they would go their separate ways to separate colleges and she would no longer have Roble to rely on to fill her social calendar.

So maybe that was why she said yes to this excursion of going to the only gay club in town.

Once they got in, she could see nothing but the sweaty, gyrating bodies that adorned the club's interior. Men of every size and shape (though more in-shape than not) kept colliding into Roble and Sabrina, the sheer mass of their forms throwing them off-balance. There were one or two that eyed Roble in a hey-who-is-that-let-me-talk-to-him kind of way, but then their eyes would fall onto her and then cut away. When Sabrina caught her friend making eyes at a man who looked to be well into his twenties, she warned, "Remember – you're underage."

"Yeah, whatever. I wasn't going to do nothing."

"Uh-huh." Sabrina found Roble's hand in the darkness and held onto it. Even in this sweaty mosh pit of a club, she could smell his cologne. It was light and had a faint woody aroma. If they stopped being friends tomorrow, she knew she would always remember his scent.

The music seamlessly slipped into a 90s-era pop hit and the millennials in the club cried out in jubilation before storming the dance floor. Their voices, a chorus of rehearsed lyrics against the otherwise noisy atmosphere of the building. So noisy, in fact, that when Roble looked back at Sabrina and yelled, "Let's get a drink!" she had to lean forward and ask him to repeat it.

"Let's get a drink!" her friend cried, his voice hitting her ear between boyband lyrics of yesteryear. As his words brushed past her, she managed to catch sight of a familiar face. A young man not too much older than her, holding onto another, his face caught somewhere between contentment and pleasure as his dark eyes reflected the dancing lights of the club.

"Oh shit!" Sabrina ducked behind Roble's broad shoulders.

"What?"

"Don't move!" she cried. "Shit-shit-shit!" In her heels, she was taller than he was, so she had to crouch low to hide.

"Sabrina?" His tone dipped with concern, but he listened to her and stayed in place. Instead, he awkwardly reached for her hand in the blinking lights and squeezed. "What's wrong? What happened?"

“PLAYS WELL WITH OTHERS.”

Elizabeth Wadsworth Ellis

On the West 7th Rec Center field off St. Clair Avenue, a group of adults, ages 20-40+, were playing a friendly game of touch football. There was defense, offense, guarding 1-on-1. Cones marked yard lines and out of bounds, and a green swatch was thrown down to show yards gained. There were no uniforms, no helmets; no beefy buff washboard abs. Players came in all sizes: some heavy; others tall, thin, or thick and most seemed happy and free to gambol. They didn't seem reckless or rash, but carefree, frisky. Feisty.

Perhaps they are neighbors who organized this and maybe it occurs in other cities with other men every Saturday. There was no concession stand or spectators, no audience to cheer, or wives in lawn chairs. You could hear at least one wife say in the background, “I asked you to clean out the garage three weeks ago.”

Birds chirped, a fire truck blared, a plane flew over, a rowdy beer pedal-wagon and a train rolled through the background. Meanwhile the players exerted themselves, were oft times frustrated; exasperated at a missed catch. Consequences? “A-a-a-h!” a player said when he was displeased with himself. He gnashed his teeth in private.

Players took turns as quarterback. No whistles were blown, no flying into rage, everybody seemed to know the rules. (Do they watch the pros on TV?) And they were honest. When their opponent touched them they stopped action. End of play.

“Third down!”

“It's all about the ball,” a weekend soccer player once said. “No, it's not. If it was you could just stare at the ball,” someone corrected him. “When you are playing,” he replied, “there is no boss, no bills, no rent, or a woman fussing, it's just ball.”

A soccer goalie once threw himself face down on the ground like a 3 year old in a temper tantrum for a missed score. It's about not letting your team down with failure.

Even in casual play there were collisions with earth. Carnage was not expected, but when one of the players did not get up both teams surrounded him. (“You o.k.?”) He tore up a knee; one knee was already ace-wrapped. Play was stopped with polite concern. Some kind of protocol was already in full force and effect for injury: stop, wait; resume when sufficient time has shown respect for the fellow. In a semi-pro practice session I saw a player on the ground hurt, unable to get up. Play resumed around him. It felt brutish. In pro action the players are stoic machine-like robots. There is not this elation. Mistakes are not tolerated; a paycheck is at stake. This was light hearted not heavy handed. This was recreation. They were here because they want to play. What body is capable of: split second decisions, jumps into air to block a pass: ballet executions of perfection, exact, clean. Simplicity: look for opening or run, dodge, throw, catch. Be in command of body. And there was no price for admission.

JOHN LENNON WALL

Katherine Pemberton—Photography



A SNAP UNTO DARKNESS

Max Tran

“There is a tiny crack in every and anything; and that is how the light gets through.” Yon set a glass vial of sand on the counter beside a stone tablet etched with ancient scriptures. “And that’s how we’ll survey the dark reaches of Necorath, Mita. Mita, are you listening?” Yon leaned over, her white noodle-y hair tilting off to the side, then waved a hand in front of me. Each flicking pass of her hand was strong enough to waft my bangs, but I couldn’t feel any of it brushing against my face. The dim light from the fireplace peeked around Yon’s side, and the floorboards croaked beneath my shifting weight.

“Yes, master.” The words slipped out of my mouth with the breath of a weak bellows, interrupting my train of thought and taunting the crackling light around us. Yon wrenched a smile about her frail face and crept towards the fireplace. My neck creaked as my head turned to follow her movement. She wasn’t much older than me despite her poor posture and pockmarked skin, but her white hair and wrangled teeth would mislead anyone privy to her true age.

“Much better. You are to take that vial of sand and do as I said, Mita. Understood?” Yon pointed at the vial and waited for discernible feedback. I stared blankly back at her wanting to say I have no idea what you’re talking about, but my lips only quivered in silence. “This is why I shouldn’t oppress your unconventional personality,” Yon shrugged, “if I steal your free will, I lose your skills.” She paced between light and shadow before mumbling to herself in ardent debate. “Fine, free will it is.” With a snap of her fingers, a rush of cold washed over my body and forced me to cross my arms in

a sudden shiver; my clavicle and scapulas clicked by the abrupt gesture. I felt my heart beating and lungs filling with air. My knees were swollen, and feet were numb. All old sensations of my body reintroduced themselves by each passing second. I let out a pained gasp before scuttling towards the fireplace.

“Wh-why is it so cold? Why isn’t the fire bigger!?” The words flew out of my mouth like childish observations, but this time each were my own.

“Stop being overdramatic, I know you can’t feel a thing, and the heat would only spoil some of my precious ingredients. Did you forget? Had my spell effected you that drastically?”

“What are you—?”

“No matter, time is of the essence! Mita do you recall my instructions?”

“Only the bit about lights and cracks.” I stood up to observe the contents of the counter, still ironing out the goosebumps on my arms.

“Gah!” Yon spouted at the top of her lungs and flailed her arms, “we have no time for this! Mita, take the vial, go to the Durane Trench, and do not come back until you find a black star, or break every bone in your body!” Yon accompanied each order with a livid gesture. “Understand?”

“Y-yes, but isn’t the Durane Trench pitch black?” I picked up the vial of sand without breaking eye contact with Yon. She took a deep breath before nodding as one would upon saying *touché* to a sudden irony.

“Mita, do you at least remember the spell for opening doors?”

“Yes, but—”

“Good! Now go!”

“But...”

“Get!” Yon spit a little and flung her wild hair at me. I snatched the nearest fur cloak and flew out the door. Yon was at her boiling point, and I’d rather not have her cast another spell on me. The snow had piled up past my waist and devoured what ambience the forest would feed it. The cold felt good on my knees and feet as I waded from Yon’s cabin.

From the outside, the cabin was nothing more than a lightning-struck spruce among its luckier peers. The door contorted back into the side of the tree once it closed, making no sound in the process. Winters in Necorath weren’t so bad, thanks to the doldrums of wind and predominantly clear skies; although the gods tend to be mischievous by dropping a year-worth of snow all at once. What was most inconvenient about winter was that I had to weave intricate paths through the snow to deter curious hunters. Walks through the woods were works of art. I used to weave simple geometric patterns in the snow during my first year under Yon’s servitude. Now I make elaborate patterns which could be used to inspire the next doily design. I’d be flattered if someone did.

“Don’t move,” a man shouted followed the hiss of an unsheathing sword, “under whose banner do you serve?”

“No banner, sir, I live alone in these woods,” I turned around to see a weathered soldier in furs and half-plate armor, “are you hurt?”

“I said, don’t move!” The soldier huffed, “I’ve been watching you. You were covering your tracks. Not taking a moment to rest, drink, or eat.” He pointed his sword forward and marched towards me. “I know what you’re hiding out here.”

“What is your name, sir? Have you lost your way?” I looked past the soldier; there were no signs of his origin besides the loose snow behind him. Was he here before the storm?

“My name is not up for bargaining,” he closed the distance between us, and kissed my neck with the tip of his sword. “You must be a fresh one. You’re still naïve to hiding your nature,” his wheezy chuckle puffed warm breath into to air. That’s when I noticed his eyes peer towards my mouth, then back at my eyes. I hadn’t been breathing, and when I did to speak, I hadn’t exhaled warm breath as he did. Normally I’d cover up with a scarf, but I was in too big of a hurry this time; the soldier was right, I wasn’t hiding my nature. “You’re going to make me a rich man, witch’s thrall.”

“Thrall!?”

The soldier extended his sword arm and pierced through my throat. A maddening pain shot through my neck as I felt vertebrae dueling steel. My vision blurred and my body went numb. The last thing I saw clearly were my hands flying forward before I heard the soldier screaming, then gagging. I couldn’t see anymore. His visage was thrashing about violently. Was he punching me? I could feel the weight of my body jostling about, but no pain beyond the sword.

Crack squish, snap. The gagging stopped.

I felt the sword slip from my throat. The soldier was motionless before me. My neck felt hot from the wound and my vision slowly returned with bodily

GLIMPSES

Margot Barry

glimpses

fragile

atoms

pressed together malleable

in human hands

permeable and accepting

the gift of its nature

collective

infinite reveals

each instance hands touch

and gather

together unaware of assembled

puzzles in veined air

experience

faceted planes

our eyes collect and carry you

we are collected

our gasps our delayed awareness

we are gathered and redistributed

sensory

murmurs

buzz in rounds like bees

joyously

the grains they disperse

are pollen in our auricles.

circle

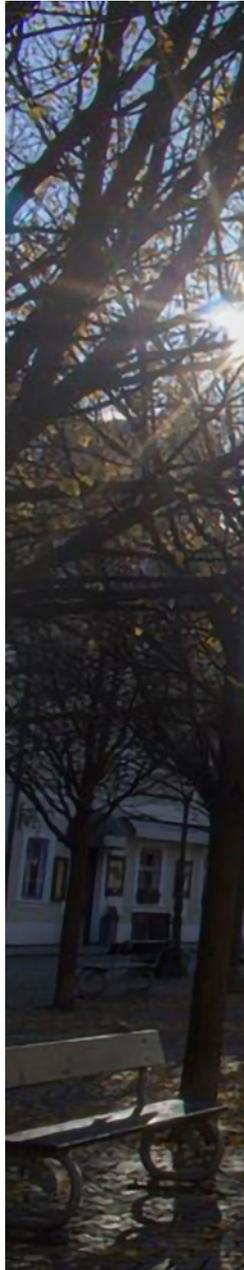
zero

slowly pipettes away clouds of

understanding

dissolves lingering particles of

metaphor leaving a whole.



Prague

Katherine Pemberton—Photography



FOR THE TREES

Emilie Peck—Photography



RIVER CHRISTMAS

Rebekah Pahr



Pine trees
Needles outstretched
Catching stacked snowflakes
Sparkles balanced, forming soft domes
Drooping

Red field
Pooled in lap
Stream of thread hums, unspooled
Cotton dotted, green pointed ivy
Pins drop

Bows high
Scratchy white tights
Static sparks, skirts gathered
Bundled into snowsuit cocoon
Dark car

Emerge
Boots crunch, snow squeaks
Peer down frozen steep swath
Climb into sleds, mittens clutch cords
Descend

Sliding
Still woods crowding
Swooping near icy bank
Tumble through doorway, light spilling
Warm hugs

Pink cheeks
Silver greetings
Jostled, clamor gathers
Logs burn, spice swirls, river wafts dank
Stars dance

PARADISE OF BODIES, SAME AS EVERYWHERE

Hawo Jama

“It’s my brother! I saw Adam! He’s here!” Her voice was a nervous chatter lost in the pulsating music of the club. When she felt Roble turn, she dug her fingers into his shoulder. “Don’t move! Please-please-please! He can’t see me!”

“Ow! Okay, okay,” Roble cried. “Did you know? He was-um-?”

“No,” she said. “I never thought. I mean-how do you know?”

“You knew about me.”

“You’re different.”

“Why?”

“You just are. God,” Sabrina groaned. “What is he doing here?” She peeked her head over Roble’s shoulder. “Do you see him? Where is he? What is he doing?”

“I thought you didn’t want me to look.”

“Shh! He can’t see you talking to me.”

“Sabrina...”

When the music shifted once again to an 80s pop ballad of heartbreak, the slightly older men of the club reacted with the same vigor and excitement their younger counterparts had a song earlier. Clammy bodies rushed to the center of the club with drinks in hand, singing until the veins of their

necks popped. A mishmash of colors and facial hair emerged in the light and their joy, which would have otherwise been contagious for her, filled up the spaces their bodies could not. Sabrina could feel Roble begin to break from her, his eyes captured by another man from across the way. Before she could say anything, he abandoned her, standing where her brother, Adam, could clearly see her. They made eye contact for much too long before he looked away, releasing the man beside him from his grip. Adam whispered something and his companion nodded before walking away, joining a group at the other side of the room. Once alone, Adam turned away from his sister completely and nursed what looked to be a beer sloshing in a stein the size of his head. In here, Sabrina could have mistaken him for anyone else had it not been for the signature scar above his right eye that cut his brow in half. He was dressed as he normally did, a cross between preppy and grunge, and he seemed to shrink right before her, his shoulders caving in, taking his once perfect posture with it. A lifetime ago, they used to be so close that she was sure he would have told her this. Or maybe he had. Maybe in between cartoons and cereal that tore the roofs of their mouths, her brother mumbled, “I think I’m gay,” but she didn’t hear him or didn’t want to. Maybe that was why they weren’t close anymore. Maybe past Sabrina had

shunned past Adam when he needed her the most, and because she couldn't accept her older brother or react in the way he needed, he purposefully pushed her away, detangling her from the realities of his life. Tonight she watched as he hunched over his drink and Sabrina crossed the club with purpose, taking one step after another, thin heels clicking against sticky tiles. She didn't mean to scare him when she walked up and took the stool beside his, but scare him she did as he damn-near jumped when she sat down.

"Sab-Sabrina-" her brother stammered. He opened his eyes so wide, she could see the whites that circled his pupils. She slid an arm around his shoulders, as if they hugged like this every day. "Hi..." she murmured and her voice fell somewhere between his temple and the cornrows on his head.

Adam returned her hug with a weak squeeze and sat back. They both locked eyes and then looked away, unable to speak the mountain of words between them. When finally a lull in the music hit, her brother sighed and said, "Well, this is not awkward at all." And just like that, they went from not talking to all-the-talking.

"I'm sorry," she cried, her face hot with shame. She hadn't meant to catch him like this, in an element that he had clearly not meant for her eyes.

Where he once looked like the happiest man here, now he shrunk away from her, leaning as far back as he possibly could.

"Why are you sorry?" he asked her after the music changed once more.

"I didn't know--"

"No one knows."

At this, she paused, allowing the information to flow through her. "Not even Mom?"

He shook his head. "It's not like I tell her everything."

"Sorry," she said, again.

"You don't have to be sorry."

Just beyond his shoulder, his male companion was watching them closely, a suspicious look splayed across his Nordic features. "Is that your boyfriend?" Sabrina asked, noting the way the question hitched in her throat and nodding at the blond man behind them. Adam barely looked back before taking a swig of his beer.

"No," he said at first, then, "Yes," then, "This is weird."

"Yeah," she agreed. It was weird. Their conversation was all wrong, an exchange of words that stilted in the humidity of the club. All around

PARADISE OF BODIES, SAME AS EVERYWHERE

Hawo Jama

them, (mostly) men and (some) women danced, laughed, and fell against each other when the notes of the song could no longer carry them. Roble himself was holding onto a man much too old for him. Where happiness lived in the air, Sabrina and Adam rebuffed it. Awkward in the discovery of a life neither of them knew would ever intersect.

“You could have told me,” she said.

“Yeah,” he agreed.

The mountain of words were starting to give way, breaking off in icy chunks that rolled down the side. Suddenly, she was overcome with it. With everything. In her mind’s eye, Sabrina could see the arc of their relationship, once thick as thieves, and then nothing as they entered their teen years, him two years before her. Conversations that had flowed easily when they were kids dissolved into half-mumbled greetings. Sabrina leaned forward in her chair as if pushed and grabbed on to her brother’s arm. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

He tried to shrug off her grip, but she wouldn’t let go.

“I would have been okay with it – you know?” she said. “It’s not like I made fun of Roble when he came out. I would have been okay.” Her brother looked at her for a long time, too long, as she could no longer

maintain their eye contact and looked down at the haze of red tiles beneath their bar stools. When she looked up again, his lips were moving. “What?” she leaned closer to him, taking in the smell of warm beer and old cigarettes. “Say it again?”

He sighed and drowned her in a windfall of warm beer breath. “I said...I wouldn’t have been—” His words halted, constricting in his throat before he spat them out. “I wasn’t okay with it.”

And there it was. She leaned back and he sat up straight, as if the words alone pushed them apart. There was a life he had that, had she not run into him in the one gay club on this very cold night, she never would have known. He never would have told her. She could see it in the way both his eyes and his voice dipped at the confession, and she wanted nothing more but to hug her brother then for all of times she didn’t before. She compromised by holding onto his hand again.

“I’m sorry,” she told him. “It must have – you must have been lonely.”

He blinked quickly and turned away from her.

“Maybe if you said something—” she started, but no, no, that was wrong. She didn’t want to shift the blame to him. “I’m sorry you didn’t feel comfortable telling me.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“I know,” she said. “I’m still sorry.” She hesitated then. “I would have been okay – you know – until you were ready to be, I would have been okay for the both of us.”

He whipped around to look at her as if to wait for her to recall the words, bringing them back from the air and into her lungs, but she didn’t. And when she hadn’t, a small uncertain smile slowly broke through his lips and reached all the way up to his copper eyes. Adam leaned forward and put his free hand on her head as if he was two decades her senior and not two years. “Thank you.”

She felt the weight of the world in his hand – of unsaid words, conversations never held in summer afternoons, morning talks never had over breakfasts of homework and new crushes that bubbled under the surface of their monotonous lives. When he pulled back, her head felt floaty and light. She didn’t know what to say.

When the silence stretched too long, Adam brought his beer stein up to his lips. “I never would’ve expected to see you here.”

“Well, Roble–” Sabrina shrugged before pointing him out in the crowd, swinging amongst the sweaty men at the center of the club. Always the center of

attention, her friend. It didn’t matter where they were, that spotlight found him everywhere.

“Oh,” Adam shook his head. “I don’t know why I expected anything else. Does Mom know you’re here?”

“No. Can you imagine?”

He laughed and she leaned in to hear it. “I don’t even want to think about it.” He paused between sips. “Is this your first one? Your first time here?”

She nodded. “It’s so...lively in here. I bet it’s better when it’s warmer out though.”

“You’re not missing much.”

“What’s it like?” she asked him.

He shrugged, “Parade of bodies. Same as everywhere. Hairy bellies.”

CRACKED UP

Emilie Peck—Photography



THE ONE ABOUT ADDICTION

Katherine Pemberton



You don't want to look down,
the water is choppy and dark
and you don't know what's under the surface.
Close your eyes and jump,
because people are watching you
and because you love the feeling
of free falling.

A SNAP UNTO DARKNESS

Max Tran

control. I figured he surrendered and lost his resolve to carry on murdering me in cold blood, but I was wrong. I felt warm leather clenched within my hands and the soldier's visage came into focus: my hands were wrapped around his neck, and he was limp. I let out a scream and freed the soldier from his noose. I fell on my backside, mirroring him. Thick blood trickled from his mouth and bloodshot eyes. I felt hysterical, but my heart was steady. It didn't feel like my own; it didn't reflect my emotions. I crawled over to him throwing the sword into deeper snow and searching his body for any emblems... just as I thought. On the collar of his cuirass was the crest of Teren's Spades. Witch hunters.

I knew I had to press on. Yon's quest was more important than warning her about these men... right? I peeked over the concealing snow and surveyed for more suspicious lumps that may become hostile; although there were none. I took a moment to sit by the hunter's corpse and think. If I returned to Yon and warned her of the hunters, would she praise me? My cheeks blushed at the thought, but my hand waved sideways in disagreement. Or, would I encourage the wrath of a thousand suns for preemptively returning? My hand then snapped and pointed forward with index and thumb extended. Fine. Durane's Trench it is. I'll tell Yon about the hunters later.

The trench was massive. Expanding from one end of the continent to the other: it was a somber formation which exuded a purple aura that reeked

of rotten pine and moist stone. I took a natural path carved into the earth and saw the same bubbling corpses of wizards and scholars who came to study this place. I could tell the wizards apart from the scholars by their choice of headgear; the scholars wore those outdated plague masks and the wizards didn't wear anything. I covered my nose to keep the stench from sticking to my nostrils, as a force of habit, despite not needing to breathe at all. Little did people know, the dank purple cloud only lingered towards the top of the trench. The daylight began to wane with my descent, and I heard Yon's voice echo in my thoughts.

"Mita, my dear, you are to survey to bottom of the Durane Trench and find me a powerful stone," Yon was writing a new spell upon a wooden tablet.

"No way, I can't see in the dark," I retorted, forcing Yon's head aback.

"Mita, mind that you are alive thanks to me, so I will not tolerate backtalk from a thinking corpse."

"Yes, master," I rolled my head facetiously, but Yon interpreted the gesture differently.

"Enough of your attitude child," she began twirling her fingers and waving her arms in a trance, "listen here and listen well, for now you'll stiffen and succumb to my spell!" I became ensnared by a ghostly thread, that wrapped around my neck, and was unable to move. "Now take a moment to reflect on your actions while I prepare the items for your journey."

I hated that spell. I would be overwhelmed by claustrophobia the instant it cast, but I couldn't steady my breath or close my eyes to calm down. The most I could ever do was think about something more peaceful and detach my thoughts from my surroundings.

Necorath had been my home since last winter, and Yon had been my master since she found my body in the forest. Being the puppet of a sorceress wasn't all too bad, but the day-long lectures of the arcane mysteries made me wish I were dead again, or at least deaf.

At every turn I refused to obey the premise of a risky adventure, seeing how risk is how one meets with Death. Yon, however, sees every moment as an opportunity to teach me about magic and its usefulness. The lesson this time was about light-sifting, which had something to do with making light seep out of small cracks in earth and metal to form a flameless torch. I really had no idea what she goes on about, but I'll admit to receiving a bit of vicarious pleasure by watching her explain magic to me so enthusiastically.

"Mita, are you listening?" Those words made me smile, deep down. They meant my time was worth something to her. My memories were faint, but I remembered feelings of worthlessness in my previous life. However, I lived before serving under Yon was a life filled with longing and loneliness. Now, even though it's by the binds of magic, my time was important to someone.

The darkness was overbearing, now and every step further became a gamble. I dropped down to all fours and inched my way around, hoping to find

any random rock and call it a day. I couldn't tell how fast I was going until I hit my head on a stalactite and kinked my neck. The impact must have been much harder than I felt because the vial of sand, spilled forward and clicked about the rocky floor. That's right, the light spell!

... what was it again?

I took in a breath in to recite the spells I knew, most of which were useless, like making things warm and creating water out of thin air. I recited spells under my breath until something else growled in the darkness. I stopped reciting...

Tick, tack. Tick, tack.

The claws on stone echoed between the floor and low ceiling. A beast was nearby. I listened intently and prepared to crawl backwards. Silence. It was listening, too. I slid my foot back to feel an open path in the darkness. Slowly, then steadily, the next foot. My heart wasn't pounding despite my racing thoughts; was I soon to be eaten, will I be torn asunder? Whatever stalked in the dark was close, unless the echo deceived me. The thought crossed my mind to stay completely still until it left, but the uncertainties felled my patience. I moved my right arm down to continue backtracking.

Ting-ling, ling-ling-ling!

I winced at the sound of me hitting something made of glass and knocking it away. The faint sound was a screaming crash in this silence. I heard the beast sniffing about somewhere, off in the darkness, and then the brief clicks of a prance. The tapping stopped and I tried to listen past my body's calm heartbeat.

Bump-thump... bump-thump... bump... thump.

A SNAP UNTO DARKNESS

Max Tran

Rapid scratching of bone on stone erupted from around me! Several long-piercing teeth sunk into my right arm and began twisting and thrashing. A foul mucous splattered about and filled my screaming lungs with a rancid stench. I was battling the world now: darkness, pain, and confusion. If only I could land a kick, or a punch, anything to deter the beast's assault. The beast loosened its grip, but it immediately reinstated the hold. A blunt crack echoed through the dark as my humerus snapped under the beast's jaw. It's taking my arm!

I swung my left hand across my chest to feel for an eye to gouge, but the undulating kept me from reaching any soft organs. Now I was being pulled like a sack of flour; the beast was trying to finish the job of consuming my arm. My cloak sleeve ripped and added to the choir of growling and screaming. Then, the tugging stopped...

Silence.

I couldn't hear it over my heavy breathing. I crossed my hand over to my right side; my arm was gone. Animals are not much different than humans, Mita," Yon's voice pulsed from the annals of a previous lecture, "they only hunt for two reasons: to eat, or to kill, but never both." If that was true, I'm to expect my end in this wretched place. I couldn't calm my breathing, which told the beast I was still well-alive. It will soon come and spill me open, like... like a crack! The spell of opening!

"Nowhere to hide o'evil night," I shouted. I heard the clicking of the beast's claws ramble towards me. "Thus, make way for God's might!" A flash of light flooded the trench from the vial of sand; it

was kicked far enough from me to illuminate the lupine six-eyed beast before engulfing us in white light. The spell dampened after the incantation to where I could see. The beast was cowering in pain as our respective positions on the food chain were now reversed. My arm was nowhere to be seen, so I picked up the vial and ran.

The Durane Trench was a spectacle in the light. Veins of silver and pristine gemstones were glistening on the walls, untouched by man. The base of the trench was conveniently flat; the wavy obsidian formations was evidence that lava flow had dominated this path years before. I was at a loss for where the black star could be, so I continued down the endless gallery of gems. I perched upon a flat rock then loose a long sigh. The quiet of the trench was different than the snow; it was humming to the wind that passed above and never seized its song. I closed my eyes to further enjoy the music. I saw the magical light fading through my eyelids, then sprung up to revitalize it.

"Nowhere to hide o'evil – wait..." I let the light die out as the trench transformed around me; the shining gems faded with the magic. Once the light was completely gone, all that remained were glowing purple rocks that looked like dragon scales hidden amongst the brighter gems. The black star. I jumped to grab hold of a hefty chunk that protruded from the wall, failing several attempts before snagging a grip. Pushing against the wall with my feet was enough to break a piece loose. I tried to

cushion my fall with my other arm, but crashed on my face in its absence. Yon wasn't kidding about breaking my bones.

There weren't any more signs of hunters on the way back, and the one I encountered earlier was still there. His companions were either dead or left him to be forgotten. When I returned home, Yon was too preoccupied in her scriptures to lift an eyebrow.

"Yon, it's me, I'm back."

"Yes, yes, who else would it be?" Yon wiped her nose on her wrist and kept writing while I hung up the torn cloak and placed the black star upon the countertop. Yon snapped up from the loud thud and sprung forward to greet the stone. "Oh, it's beautiful, Mita! Well done. Very well done!" Yon peeked at my arm-stub before locking her gaze onto the dark stone.

"Th-thank you," I blushed a little. "So, what's it for?" I followed her with my eyes as she glided around the cabin, poking a mortar and pestle then burning salts.

"Come here, Mita," Yon beckoned to some floorboards she removed. Before I could take a peek, she grabbed my face and readjusted my head, popping vertebrae with a single twist. "Now look." Cozied beneath them was a coffin housing a young woman's body.

"Who's that?" There were several scars on the body's wrists, ankles, and neck. Some were from shallow cuts, while the others were callous rashes and deep gouges.

"Mita, my dear, that is you," Yon smiled and panned a hand out. "I thought it was such a waste of a beautiful girl. Don't you?"

"I don't know," I knelt down beside the inlaid coffin and teared up. Looking at the body told me a sad tale. "There aren't any mortal wounds."

"Yes, you froze to death out there. Although I'm not surprised you don't remember," Yon turned to tend her other concoctions while I loomed over the corpse.

"What will become of this body? What are you saving it for?" I stood up and faced Yon, who was wafting colored smoke and glowing powders toward the black star. She was in a deep focus as I wandered closer to her. Moments later, the stone began to glow a bright purple and ring like an iron bell.

"I plan to use this and put you back in your old body, Mita. Your life is key to getting into places not meant for me."

"After all you've done? Do as you wish."

"Fair," Yon carried the black star to the coffin, "but I won't be needing your permission after this. It was fun having you around, so maybe we'll see each other again some time." The black star began glowing furiously over the corpse.

"Wait, Yon, maybe there's another - "

"No, Mita, this is goodbye." Yon snapped her fingers and my vision went black.

I awoke in a field of poppies dressed in white silk. I was inside the corpse that once laid in the coffin, but now alive. My heart was racing, and my breath was rapid. I stood up to blue skies of spring and green grass. The breeze guided my gaze towards the northern hills past the Durane Trench where my home was perched atop a broad hill, encapsulated by stone walls.

CONTRIBUTORS

Rebekah Akervik (Pahr) is a Metro State Alumni who graduated in 2012 and majored in Technical Communication. She is currently working for Westinghouse and lives in St. Paul with her husband. Rebekah grew up in the Twin Cities and enjoys writing pieces that explore themes of childhood and nature.

Margot M. Barry graduated from Metro State in May 2019 with a Liberal Arts BA and a Creative Writing minor. She'll enter the Master of Library & Information Science graduate program at St. Catherine University this fall. Margot loves libraries, archives, food, and hiking along trails. She hopes to continue working with and writing from them in the years ahead.

Megan Bauer graduated from the Social Work program at Metro State in spring 2019. She also holds a degree in Latin American Studies from UW-Eau Claire. She has had a number of pieces published in Haute Dish during her time as a student at Metro. She has always considered writing her primary passion and hopes to impact others through her work.

Leylo Boru is a Nursing major, due to graduate May 2022. She came to the U.S. less than five years ago and joined MSU in the fall of 2018. She works at a facility that combines senior living, assisted living, memory care, and hospice all in one. When she is not working or at school, she's at home or hanging out with family or friends.

Carlyn Crouse is a Creative Writing and Game Studies student at Metropolitan State University. In her spare time, she is an avid gamer and fumbles on the ukulele since her hands are too small for the guitar. She lives in fantasy, dreams reality, and can never quite distinguish the two. Her favorite genre to write is dark comedic horror.

Maggie Dyslin is a Minneapolis-based Creative Writing Major in her senior year at Metropolitan State University. She dabbles in Graphic Design, along with a little bit of Photography in her spare time. With a love for all things out of the ordinary, she is currently working on her first Young Adult fantasy fiction novel, among many other smaller projects on the design side.

Melissa Gillman is a part time student majoring in English with a minor in Creative Writing. She discovered the love of written word at eight years old and has been writing ever since. When not working full time or studying, she is usually working on her novel or unwinding with a good video game. She is happy to be included in the fall issue of Haute Dish

Hawo Jama is currently (and almost done!) pursuing a Creative Writing B.A. with a minor in Technical Communication at Metro State. In her limited free time, she enjoys writing stories she'll never finish, re-reading books she's read a million times, binge-watching Brooklyn 99, and enjoying any time she can hanging out with her cats (and friends and family, if she can squeeze them in).

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Peter Lindstrom is a creative writing major who will be graduating in December. He writes short humorous fiction that is often based on preposterous premises and impossible situations. If humor is the first arrow in his quiver, dark twists is the second arrow. He has no other arrows. The rest of Peter's arrows were wasted shooting the moon in a game of hearts. Scientists may not give him credit for it, but those in the loop know that he caused the January 21st blood moon.

Danielle Nichole Staiert is 33 years old and has three children and three cats. Graduating this semester from Metropolitan State University in the college of Individualized studies, her focus is on Philosophical and Ecological Approach to Ecology and Biology. Living life through nature, she writes poetry, rock climbs, rough camps, kayaks, downhill skis, illustrates, rests, and reads endlessly. She will continue working for the environment and publish poetry and other works.

“Writing her way like everyone else,” is **Mai Nyua Lee’s** motto. When not thinking about writing dark, fantasy novels, she extends herself into poetry, or taking pictures to capture the silent presence of love and nature.

Emilie Peck is a Creative Writing major at Metro State, due to graduated December 2019. She earned her AA at Minnesota College in December of 2017, at which point she transferred to Metro. When she’s not writing, tutoring with TRIO, or snapping pictures, she’s running, reading, and practicing other verbs that may or may not begin with the letter R.

Katie Pemberton will graduate in May 2020 with a bachelor’s degree in technical communication and professional writing. Her interests are in film, writing, reading, travelling, and photography. You can find her planning her next trip or hanging with her five sisters!

Max Tran is currently an undergraduate at Metropolitan State University who is working towards a degree in Creative Writing. His works follow high-fantasy and science fiction of short story and novel length. Max draws his inspirations from wanting to share his fantastic worlds with others. His writing style typically follows grand adventures and an in-depth cast of characters, who band together for a common goal. This year, he is focusing on flash fiction, which have been focused on fiction and fantasy-themed stories with mysterious auras and profound morals. Max’s most recent works have explored comedy and romance.

Elizabeth Wadsworth Ellis was an outside child, conceived outside marriage, wed outside her culture, served outside her country (in Serbia, Sofia and St. Petersburg, Russia) and holds beliefs outside her upbringing. She also jumped out of an airplane.

Dr. Denise E. Williams, “Dr. DEW”, serves as an Associate Professor, researcher, and community alliance builder focused in Entrepreneurship and Organizational Behavior. Integrating extensive corporate and entrepreneurship experience with cultural competency into her classroom, Dr. Williams has a special commitment to developing the innovative mindset, career readiness, and positive psychology in underrepresented populations. Shared through conferences and publications, her research examines factors influencing entrepreneurship success; social entrepreneurship; and impacts of entrepreneurial mindset and well-being, coaching, and diversity. Williams is co-founder of the HERO Factor Project, an educational pilot that builds innovative mindset and career readiness competencies. Dr. Williams earned: Doctorate and Masters from Indiana University, Kelley School of Business in organizational behavior and entrepreneurship; Wharton School of Business MBA; Spelman College BA, Economics. Dr. Williams has served in numerous community leadership positions in Minnesota and throughout her career.