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Curtis Glover

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Samantha Longval

Anais Mercedes

Alex O'Bryan

Sam Passamonte

Sam Robinson

Eman Taha

Jasmine Tyrance

Ruth Way

The Manatee

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WHAT'S *THE MANATEE*?

The Manatee is a literary journal run by the campus students of Southern New Hampshire University. We publish the best short fiction, poetry, essays, photos, and artwork of undergraduate SNHU students, and we're able to do it with the support of the Creative Writing Club.

Visit themanatee.weebly.com for information, submission guidelines, news and past issues. Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TheManateeAtSNHU for updates to our submission periods.

THE MANATEES

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Editor's Note

I have been working with *The Manatee* since my sophomore year, both publishing and editing pieces. Since I first began interacting with the literary magazine, I knew I wanted to rise to Editor-In-Chief. Having worked in the position for a year, I can truthfully say that it lived up to my expectations. I found the experience to not only be rewarding, but inspiring.

There are quite a few thank you's that need to go around for this edition; the first of which I must give to the Editors. Thank you for your suggestions, your communication, and for the eye for detail that you all have. I have appreciated the hands you've all lent and hope that you continue to do so for the editions to come.

Thank you to all who contributed to this issue. For some of you, it was your first time submitting, and you did so with a touch of excited fear. It is your stories, your art, and your creativity that make *The Manatee* a reality year after year. I hope that you continue to put your work, of all mediums, out into the world.

The SNHU English faculty as a whole also deserves a thank you. You have encouraged your students to submit and given them the support they need to do so. Beyond *The Manatee*, you support and encourage your students in their day-to-day lives. You have all inspired me over these past four years and played a large part in making SNHU my home. I am very proud to have been your student.

More directly, thank you to Allison Cummings. She checked in on me throughout this entire process and kept me updated. Her genuine care for the magazine, and her students, is evident and appreciated. Thank you to David Moloney, who made sure to have a finger on the pulse of *The Manatee* throughout the year. I always felt very supported by him, and enjoyed every laugh let out in his classes. And, although he is not in the English Department, thank you to David Humphreys. He encouraged my creativity in other mediums that I could not have imagined alone.

Writing, editing, and excessive emailing have come together to create this issue of *The Manatee*. Enjoy reading!

Ruth Way
Editor-In-Chief

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Nick Biron

Headhunter

Eric Bruno

The ding of the bell rang out through the aisles of the convenience store. A man darted through the open door, his backpack bumping against the frame, knocking him off balance. He grabbed onto a shelf to steady himself and looked around. The other patrons moved back and forth through the store, as if unaware of his presence. He took the opportunity to investigate. The contents of the shelves were half-stocked and scattered, but that served his needs well enough. He grabbed what he could and shoved it into his pack: canned goods, first-aid supplies, and some chocolate for the kids. He passed by a display of razors and felt the coarse stubble on his chin. A knife made for a decent shave, but he missed the motorized, five-bladed comfort he had had before things went to hell. Packing a few in with the other supplies, he figured no one else would make use of them.

The scavenger turned around to leave and bumped into one of the patrons. He looked up at the stranger and took a step back, his hand moving to the knife at his belt. The other man paused for a moment, still staring at the far wall. The scavenger watched his eyes roll in the sockets, as if they weren't connected to anything in his head. The stranger resumed his walk, and the scavenger stepped aside. The stranger took slow, heavy steps. He seemed to be in some sort of daze. The

scavenger watched him turn the corner of the aisle. He let his hand fall to his side. No matter how many times he saw it, the actions of those things still put him on edge. Taking care to avoid interrupting the others, he made his way to the door and grasped the handle.

It hit his ears before he saw it: a series of cracks and snaps, sporadic and off-tempo, audible over the hum of the freezers. His eyes scanned the street outside through the glass. Deserted for now at least, but the sound continued to increase with each passing second. The scavenger ducked out of sight, beside the door. He reached into his pack and pulled out a hand mirror. It took some adjustment to get the angle he wanted, but he soon had a good view of the street. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead as the sound grew ever closer. He wiped them off with the back of his plaid shirt, pushing his hair aside as he did so. The noise grew to its peak, and the source walked into his frame.

It wasn't the first time he had seen one of the creatures, and he had yet to find one that looked different. They resembled humans in build, though their silhouette could never be confused with one. Their bodies were crooked parodies: legs spun like ropes, feet twisted to face different directions, knees bent inward. Their arms, bent at impossible angles, ended in oversized fists topped with gnarled, elongated fingers. These too defied convention in their placement, broken back up over the knuckles. The skin of their bodies, colored a dull copper, had a leathery, worn quality to it. With each movement their broken bodies produced

the cacophony of snaps, crunches and cracks. If the creatures had heads, perhaps they'd let out a scream of pain with each step. Instead, their necks ended in stumps, some sort of oozing mass visible through the hole.

He had heard different names for those things during his travels: Headless, Seekers, Shamblers. One unfortunate fellow, his mind having succumbed to the horrors around him, even called them Death itself.

The man put a bullet through his brain after their conversation ended.

The scavenger watched as it walked down the street. With each step its body lurched to the side, unable to support itself under its own deformities. It stumbled forward, oblivious to the world around it. It tripped and fell to the ground, where it struggled to return to its feet. The scavenger felt an odd sense of pity toward the Headless. Those feelings went from his mind as the memories began to replace them. He remembered hearing the report on the news about the first sightings of the Headless. Everything started to collapse after that. More and more people started to fall to those things. They were by no means immortal; he had even managed to kill a few himself. The scars on his neck throbbed. A constant reminder of just how much luck was on his side.

He watched the Headless shuffle down the street, body popping as it advanced. The scavenger didn't want to risk having to fight it, so he

decided to wait out its passing. He did a quick sweep of the surrounding area, and although he couldn't see any others, he still wanted to play it safe.

Silence fell over the street.

The scavenger, knowing what that signified, peeked out from his cover to get a better view.

The Headless in the street started to tremble. The movements started off minute but increased in ferocity over a few seconds. It began to blur as the tremors picked up speed. When it seemed like the shakes couldn't get any faster, they stopped. It stood in perfect stillness for a moment, then began to change. The backwards and twisted joints on its body started to right themselves, spinning and contorting as the horrible cracking sounds returned. The scavenger put his hands over his ears to block out the noise, which blared at a higher volume than at any point before the transformation. The Headless hunched over, and the leathery skin coating it started to shift. From the layers underneath, pigment lightened the copper enough to appear dull blue. The skin around the calves stretched downward and hung loose around the ankles, giving the appearance of crude pant legs. Its torso continued to change colors, settling on a dirty green, ending on its biceps. The transformation complete, the Headless let out one final snap as it rolled back its shoulders and stood up straight.

The altered Headless took off in the direction of the woods, disappearing into the trees, the crunch of the leaves getting quieter and quieter. The scavenger looked around, and not seeing any stragglers, exited the store into the cool midday breeze. His own experience with the Headless told him that they couldn't see or hear in any apparent way, a conclusion supported by the others in the group, yet somehow they could "see" humans once they got close enough. The transformation he witnessed meant that this particular Headless found prey, prey that wore the same outfit it tried to mimic. He cursed his own ignorance at how those things worked. He wondered about the unfortunate soul who managed to be caught unawares. He shook his head. Not his problem. His problem waited for him back at camp, with open arms and a warm bed. He set off in the direction of his home.

The scars on his neck started to burn. He turned back toward the tree line. Experience told him that it should be fine, that while they were dangerous, the Headless were no bigger threat than a normal human. Still, he couldn't quite rid himself of the need to pursue it, to ensure that whoever it sought to harm came out alive. He thought of the family waiting for him, of the people who counted on him, of the ones who sacrificed themselves for him. He had to return to them, and if that meant letting a stranger die, then that decision had to be made.

He ran a finger along his scars.

A scream rang out from the forest.

He took off into the trees, toward the source of the disturbance. He wouldn't be able to face his family if he sat by and knowingly let someone die. Those that he met who acclimated to the new status quo assured him that those feelings, that drive, would leave him. Though he swore he wouldn't let that happen, in that moment, dashing under branches and jumping over logs, he wished they had. He drew the hunting knife from its sheath, prepared to take on the Headless as soon as it came into view. A group of shadows rushed along the ground towards him. He looked up to see a flock of birds retreating from the trees in front of him. Not far now; he braced himself for a fight and pushed through a group of branches.

A figure knelt on the forest floor, amidst the fallen leaves and trampled soil. The scavenger recognized their clothes: the same the Headless shifted to mimic. With their back to the scavenger, their shoulder length black hair obscured any features of their head. The scavenger approached with caution, putting little weight into his steps in an attempt not to be heard. He observed the figure, motionless in the breeze, hands resting at their sides. His eyes fell to those hands, and he noticed the blood coating the long fingers. The scavenger took a step back, and the figure rose to their feet. They took a few shaky steps and turned themselves to face him. Their face wore the telltale expression: eyes loose and rolling, mouth opened, stuck in the last remnants of a scream. Blood coated their neck, a thin line separating the Headless

from its newly acquired trophy. Uncaring of the scavenger's presence, it took a few more comfortable steps forward, docile now that it seemed "complete." The scavenger noticed the body of its unfortunate hunt, sprawled out on the forest floor, the leaves around the neck stump painted red with blood.

The scavenger strode forward and drove his knife, twice, into the neck of the Headless. He allowed it to wobble past him and collapse on the ground, its new life cut short. He observed the corpse of the unknown victim. He lowered his head and apologized. Had he not been so indecisive, so neglectful of his own code, the camp could have had one more safe soul behind its walls. He hoped they didn't have a family, at least. That way no one would miss them in this world, and there would be someone to meet them in the next.

An ear-splitting cracking emanated from the trees behind him. He spun around in time to see a second Headless, already transformed, break into a run towards him. The ambush left him no time to retreat or formulate a plan. He stood his ground with knees bent and waited for the opportune moment to strike. The Headless closed the gap in a matter of seconds, and just as it lunged for his throat, he dropped low, driving his knife up and into its chest. A single stab couldn't stop the momentum the Headless carried, and it barreled into him, knocking him to the ground. The Headless climbed atop him before he could recover, wrapping its freezing hands around his throat, choking the life out of him. He

struggled to breath, his attempts at prying apart the grip on his throat meeting with failure. His knife re-entered the Headless, and it paused its throttling.

He stabbed it again and again, losing count as whatever liquid filled its body splashed onto his face. He felt the creature's grip falter with each strike, and once it went slack he twisted himself around, throwing the Headless to the side. He rushed to his feet and loomed over his assailant as it thrashed in its death throes, black liquid spilling onto the crushed leaves. The writhing slowed to a halt, and its body dissolved into a puddle of copper sludge.

The scavenger gasped for breath, letting out a series of rasping coughs. He wiped his face on his sleeve, staining it with a trail of black. He walked over to the first Headless and knelt beside it. He pushed aside the hair with his knife and began cutting into the neck. The new connections formed by the Headless hadn't been completed, which meant the process went smoothly, or as smooth a process as decapitation could be. The head came free of the body with one rough pull, and the Headless melted into the same sludge as its brethren. The scavenger took the head and placed it next to the original owner. He set down his pack and opened one of the compartments. He felt around, before removing a small folding shovel. He looked down once more at the corpse by his feet. He whispered a final apology and got to work digging a grave.

Absence

Jasmine Tyrance

I loved you,
Because I thought I was supposed to.

Little girls like me
Smiled, pretending to be okay.
I lived that lie every day.

Deep down,
The darkness inside my heart
Lurks and claws at me,
Trying to make me drown.
I fight it.

The poison spreads,
Infecting my body.
The damage from your actions,
Inflicted this pain inside me.
I hide it.

I read your letters.

I believed your promises,
That you could change.
I had the gall to hope,
Things would be better.

So, I waited for you.
I waited.
And I waited.

You never came.

Life went on and I grew up.
Accepted that I was not enough.

You say you love me,
And think that's all you need
You forget how you just leave.
Now, your love is not enough.

Not for me.
You're not my father.
Because
You chose to go.



Sam Robinson

Stone

Kelly Ladouceur

He stood alone in the garden
Dust collected on his face
On his strong hands
His eyes cast down
Lost in thought
Begging to be found

She entered the garden
She was like a fresh breeze
Gently caressing his face
The dust drifting away

He blinked away the debris
Finding the thoughts again
Memories flooding in
Looking up, he saw the sunshine
Which was her smile

So, This is Hell

Britney Brown

This robot suit is so close to being finished. There's not much of a color scheme to it, because we don't want to introduce too much light to the bottom. There are headlights on the suit so we can see, and those headlights will have cameras on them so anything I see will be transmitted back. But the camouflage of the darkness will probably be the best for me and the life living around it. We've found that all the species' eyes from the depths of the ocean are sensitive to light.

I'd always have an admiration for the deep ocean. The creatures seem brave for surviving something so dark and deep. My favorite was always the octopus. I know they aren't traditional deep-sea ocean creatures, but I know they can be. Maybe that's why I volunteered to take the suit down into the ocean. Maybe that's why I thought it was worth risking my life. If only for a peak at what the ocean offers face to face.

There were a few kinks in the robot suit; sometimes it would decide it'd have a brain for itself. I wonder why it was a good idea to volunteer. However, we've finally managed to move past that; it took us a few years, but we managed to make the perfect suit. Ideally, we want to just use the suit and control it from base. However, during testing, that

proved to be a very difficult task. Halfway through building the machine, we realized that if we spotted new species, we wanted to collect and analyze them. That took a little longer to build into the machine, but the easiest way was to put some arms that can safely grab a creature and place it in a container we made specially for them. Of course, a human would have to operate the entire suit. And now finally, we can take it out in the ocean.

Black is the color of the deep, deep ocean. Was I launched into the ocean around 60 minutes ago? I'm not sure, it's hard to tell without the light. It's extremely hard to see anything. The headlights are hardly illuminating any area to see. Then again, it doesn't really matter. This suit is designed for the very bottom. Right now, it's just sinking to get to the bottom. As it should be. There are seemingly no fish around, though every now and again, a small shrimp – or shark – might pass, but once they're gone, they're gone. We know it's possible for species to live down here, but it's rare for species to be able to survive, considering the limited amount of food and the cold currents down here. The species down here are terrifying, to say the least, but I wasn't very scared: I was in this suit, nothing could damage this suit – not anything from these species at least.

It seems to take *years* to get to the very bottom of the ocean, but once I get down there, I start drilling. The sound is nearly piercing.

Although it's muffled, it's still a piercing sound compared to the silence of the ocean.

In the deep, I can't hear any of the waves from above, I can't hear any fish pass. I can only hear my breathing. It's uncomfortable, unsettling. Once the hole was big enough for me to go through, I pushed the handles in the suit to make it go forward. I got a good look around as the suit continued to go down. I landed on a rock that was enough to hold me, though I wasn't sure if it was stable. But that didn't seem to matter once I saw the environment.

My heart stopped. I relaxed. I was taken by surprise by the beautiful sight in front of me. I always loved the ocean, but this. Wow. This is... Wow. I have no words for it. How can I describe this?

I can see better now, I can't tell whether the source of the light is natural or not, but the ocean returned to its normal colors of blue and green. Well, we can definitely say we're doing our job. We just found many of the species we can't seem to get to. They don't even *look* like anything I'm familiar with. The environment is crawling with life. I can only recognize the – for the most part – nonliving things, like the algae. It really is a beautiful sight. Like the Australian oceans. But my admiration is soon interrupted. I knew it was too good to be so beautiful. Too good to be so good.

A screech is heard in the area – in this undiscovered part of the ocean. Almost immediately, my fight or flight kicks in. My adrenaline is coursing through my brain. Could this be a threat? Although I'm wearing a protective suit made of metal, I can still hear it. It sends chills down my spine.

The sea creatures that flooded the area all scrambled to get away. I took that as a bad sign, that something bad was happening now. And then I found it.

I found the thing that screeched. Its sharp teeth protrude out, its spines up, trying to defend itself against whatever it was that was trying to kill it. Light pulsed extremely fast through the creature, almost as fast as light. As this creature spills blood, it tries to struggle against the spear in its side, struggling to free itself, trapped between a rock and the spear. Slowly, surely, the light slowed its pulsating until it came to a stop and became dark. The creature was now dead, and the creature that killed it, showed itself.

I can't tell if this creature came from a nightmare or a dream, for this creature was beautiful, yet terrifying. With spines that go up if it feels threatened, its hands webbed, human looking, yet, it didn't have any known skin color– It was *green*. Fins going from the creature's elbow to its wrist on both sides, on the side of the tail. I can't even

tell where this creature begins and where the human part ends. But it definitely had distinguishable human features. Instead of legs, its limbs seemed to be fused together to make fins, a long one that curled in a small circle towards the end. The tail was like the rest of the body, green. It wasn't even a good color green—bright. Instead, it was completely dark and gross. Back up the torso, the head was like a human, except there was no nose: instead, there were two slits in its place. There were gills at the sides of the ribs and the neck. Odd markings covered the torso and face of this... Creature... like it was born with these seemingly face-painted markings. There was hair – but it looked like Medusa's, thick and slightly curly. It didn't exactly seem to work like hair would. It seemed like the hair could be controlled, it could move on its own. Evidently, as the creature screeched, the hair went back, stiff and long as the thing grabbed the spear and pulled it out with one tug.

This was the only creature that I knew the name of. It was speculation, myths, that circled around everywhere. Unfortunately, I recognized it, of course I did, it sent my heart racing, my blood pumping, as I now feared for my life. I was never sure if mermaids would be good or bad, but I realized in this moment that they were evil.

From the devil itself.

After all, this is the bottom of the ocean, and under that. And

what else could be under there but hell?

I didn't bother moving. I couldn't speak, I couldn't scream. I wanted to abort the mission. We had made a terrible mistake. We had just opened a portal between Earth and Hell. The adrenaline coursing through my veins was telling me to get out of there, but I simply couldn't.

I couldn't help but watch as the *beast* ate its meal. A startling noise caught my attention. The rock I was on was ready to crumble. I panicked, I tried to move the suit, but the rock only fell apart and left me to sink, getting the mermaid's attention.

I was in deep trouble.

Forever

Anais Mercedes

How long is forever?

I can't promise we'll be together

Till that last feather falls from Cupid's arrow.

Your heart is black like sparrows,

old souls like Pharaohs.

There goes our love draining out of barrows.

My heart was condemned to the gallows.

Skinny-dipping into your mind behind shadows.

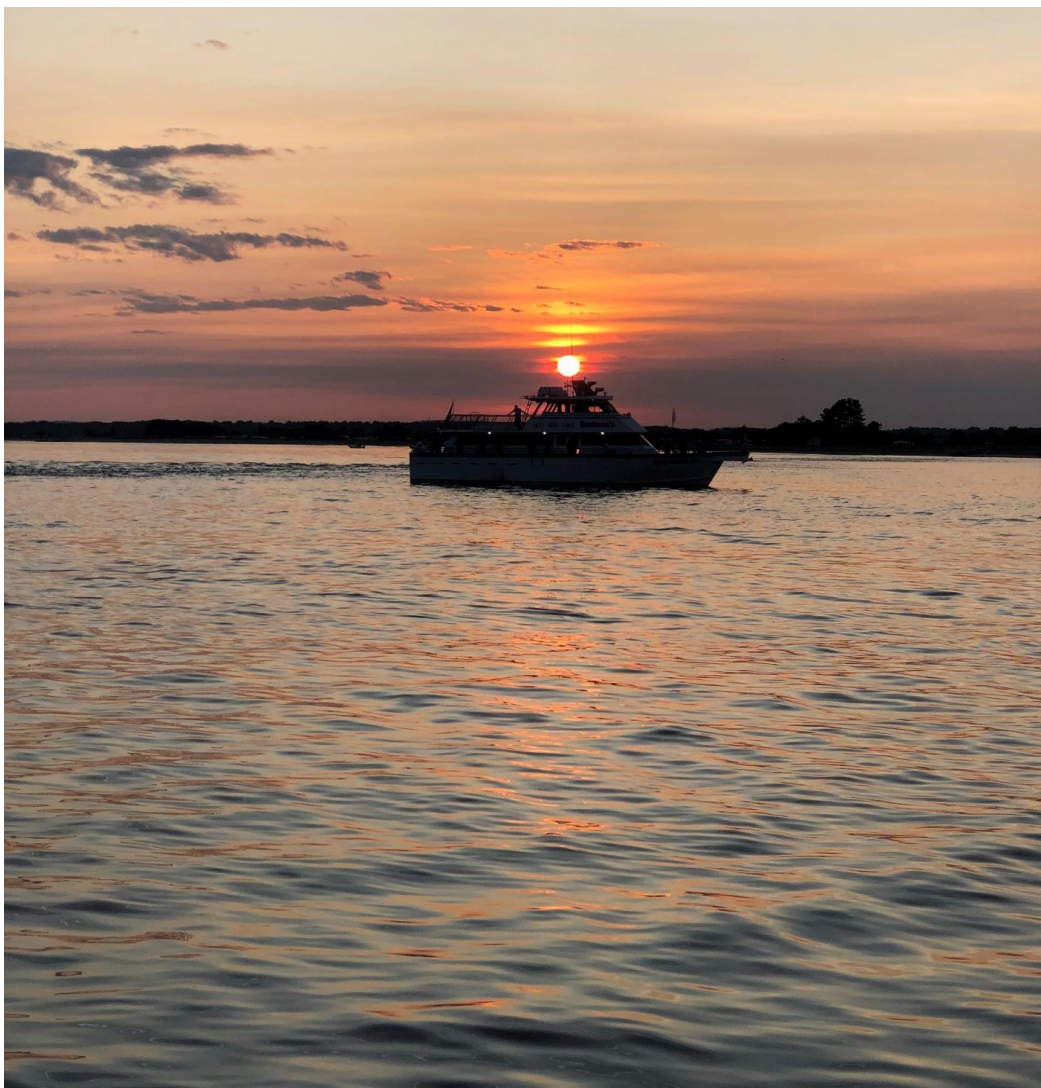
Black and white arterial walls are narrow.

Is it wrong to let our love slither into the river,

if there's poisoned arrows in Cupid's quiver?

Adam and Eve wouldn't have left each other's sides if she hadn't died.

So please don't think forever is a real word... because it's a lie.



Nick Biron

A Place of War and Peace

Zach Gillespie

Fort McHenry is a place that grabs the attention of everyone, no matter who you are in Baltimore. It's a very historical place and it looks very old, with the one outlier being the new visitor center that looks like it's made of logs. The Fort's got a certain smell to it, a smell of saltwater, fresh air, grass, and a tinge of pollution. The sounds there make me feel like there is hope for the city. It has the voices of many different languages, the sounds of cannons from demonstrations, patriotic music, historical speeches, birds chirping, and the list could go on forever. Everything that is there feels historical down to the touch on your fingertips. It is unique and has helped me through a lot in my life. This is a place where I would go and run out my frustrations or just sit staring at the water, thinking about everything that has happened. Whenever I was not myself, I would go there for a while and listen to the waves crashing against the stone seawall to clear my head. This place gave me hope in times of need. I can still recall when I first went there with my grandfather. This memory is one of my fondest because it was a complete surprise for me. We were on our way back from the store and I wasn't happy. I was no older than seven years old, but once he took me to Fort McHenry, I became instantly happy and we bonded greatly that day.

I learned all about the history of this place and I still recall most of that history today. Fort McHenry was created as a military fort during the War of 1812. This and Federal Hill are where the Americans fought against the British as part of the Battle of Baltimore, and it was the turning point of the war. After Americans won the Battle for Baltimore, they had won the war. During this fight, the British captured Francis Scott Key and while he was held prisoner on one of their ships on the Baltimore Harbor, he wrote “The Star-Spangled Banner” which later became the national anthem of the United States.

I could tell so many stories about this place but that would take too long. There was this time at summer camp. When we went up there every year for a field trip, no matter how hot it was. When I went by myself to just have a place to think. When I went there with my friends for the first time. When Pokémon Go first came out, and we walked all around the Fort for hours and hours all day, and it brought everyone, no matter how old they were, together. I could go on and on because that is just how much this place means to me, and I think I can speak for all my friends, too, when I say this, because I know a couple of them that have had similar experiences there. Some of these memories are with us all together, some not, but this place will continue to bring us together even now. It seemed to me as I was remembering all this, that those memories have been what helped shape me and are worth remembering.

Bible

Britney Brown

Why do demons deserve how they are seen,
while God is just as bad?

Belial, Behemoth, Beelzebub

Bible, belittle, blind

Evil, corrupted, bad

Baneful, baleful, black

Asmodeus, Satanas, Lucifer

Biblical, adverse, harmful

Hostile, wicked, deadly

Contagious, infectious, infective

Mary, Joseph, David

Biblical, grace, mercy

Aid, bonus, delight

Decent, bearable, respect

Elijah, Isaiah, Peter

Bible, beneficial, useful

Prosperous, benignant, secure

Wholesome, remedial, favorable



Billy Furdon

Forest Reapers: Terrors of the Night

Curtis Glover

It's nighttime, and you have spotted a strange, faint glow in the dark woods. Locals have warned you to stay clear away from the forest at night or suffer a terrible fate from the dreaded Forest Reaper. Despite all the warnings, your curiosity gets the best of you. You start to walk into the woods and try to follow that otherworldly glow. The light turns on and off, seemingly in a pattern. You can hear the dry twigs snapping under your feet, only to be guided by the phosphorescent light. You look back and can no longer see the light from the village. *How long have I been walking*; you might be asking to yourself. You begin to have thoughts of turning around, but you then spot numerous curious flashes in the distance. This is when you realize you may have fallen into a trap. Your fears become reality when a series of much brighter lights begin to glow among the trees. Your adrenaline kicks in and you start running, hoping you are running in the direction of the village. The assailants then make chase after you at an incredible speed as they descend from the trees. You glimpse four or five of these fiends as you glance behind you, attempting to escape. You realize that you can't outrun them. All of a sudden, two massive arms snap in front of you from behind. The arms

grab you and pull you in, knocking the breath out of your lungs. You have been ensnared. In your captured state, you get a better look at the attackers. They are massive, bioluminescent insects with arms like that of a praying mantis. You then feel a sharp pain behind your head, then your arms, and then your legs. You let out a bloodcurdling scream of pain and agony. You glance briefly, and you have confirmed your worst fears have become reality. The Forest Reapers have bitten you and are draining you of your flesh and blood. You start to feel weary as if your life essence is leaving you. You close your eyes, but you never wake up.

Auto Repair

Sam Passamonte

We won't care

If you break down

If you turn off

If you hold well.

But you might.

You drag your tools

Behind you, scraping

The ground, chipping

Away a little bit

Of yourself piece by piece.

You wait for someone

To help you along,

But they won't.

Service is closed today.

Sorry for the inconvenience.

You hurl your things
Over your shoulder
Lugging everything
You are
To the next stop.

It may seem like an easy fix
But underneath every part
Is in a twist, dancing around,
Waiting to be taken apart

But no one is there.
No one will care.
We won't.

We won't care.
But you might.



Nick Biron

Dragonette

Jasmine Tyrance

She is a dragonette in this day and age.

Her voice was shot,

and her opinions were ignored.

She has been chained in this dark cage,

and those savages threw away the key.

She is tired of their free captivity.

One day she will have had enough,

and she will set herself free.

Those savages restrict her from freedom,

find different ways to tighten her chains.

Every time they do this, she wishes she could bear fangs.

They keep her as a down dragon,

because they are intimidated.

They know that if she's set free,

they will be defeated.

The anger is rising up inside her.

Soon enough she will spit it out.

Her breath of fire will obliterate this prison.

When those savages hear her roar,

They will know the day has come:

The dragonette has set herself free.

She claws her way towards the light,

Finally, out of this prison.

She will rise like a Queen,

And reign free.

In a Name

Ruth Way

Isaac followed a well-established routine, remembering when it gave him joy. He used to smile when the beans made a melody by falling into the espresso machine, or when the fan blades spun into a collective blur. He used to swipe the damp rag across the counter like a paintbrush, making a temporary masterpiece, and then watch the art fade. He used to smile during early morning opening, from unlocking the door to turning on the lights.

The tradition transformed when he met her—work reduced to time not spent with her. Now he wrote her name in droplets and turned around, refusing to watch it disappear. The coffee beans whispered her name as they fell, the fan blades blurred together to resemble her eyes—the light brown winking at him from the angled ceiling. Isaac studied the clock: six hours until she came in. He felt joy then, in thinking about her.

She stopped taking her medication. Isaac could tell by the increased acne on her cheekbones. Not on her chin from menstruation or forehead from stress, but her cheeks. She tossed, knocking pillows to the stained carpet below. No store-bought chemicals put her mind at ease. She put forth all the effort to achieve the restless unconsciousness.

Isaac sat beside her, blanketless. The comforter lay strangled between her thighs in a wrestler's grip. He kissed her shoulder, tracing the mole patterns down her arm like they were constellations. He liked that: she, the universe, covered in stars.

He lay down nose to nose, so close that his eyelashes caught hers. He drank in fake fruit shampoo scent, dehydrated. It mingled with the stale laundry detergent wafting from the white pillowcase.

Her brow furrowed, making waves mid-forehead. Isaac placed a hand on hers, kissing the tips of her fingers. She pulled away, rolling and flailing. He slid off the bed, watching her writhe as he backed out of the room. As little as Isaac wanted to leave, he knew how scared she would be if she woke with someone in the room.

He met her at work. The walls, made to look old, held up quotes and local art. Handcrafted carvings wound their way up the center cylinder of each round table. They sat on perfectly mismatched tile accompanied by chairs of wire, which somehow fit perfectly. The atmosphere would fall apart if one aspect disappeared.

Another customer in line nudged her to move forward. She drank in every detail; the only customer not engrossed in a phone.

He saw her every day after that. Drink order memorized, Isaac

readied it before she arrived at the counter. Sometimes with biscotti, sometimes without. It all depended on whether she hit the gym that morning or not. She worked for a marketing company two blocks down, up on the third floor. Her cubicle sat near the heart of the office, but Isaac could sometimes see her ponytail while standing on his tip toes across the street.

She began looking over her shoulder on her walk home. Isaac wondered if she started sensing him the way he sensed her. He still hid beneath his ball cap, hoping the same drive would overcome her to seek him out.

They first touched at a grocery store. Their fingers grazed when she passed him a box of cherry tomatoes. Water drops caught the frays of her wool sweater, straying from their produce targets. A rainbow sprung from the manufactured storm beside her head, and when she turned it seemed to curve to her face perfectly. Isaac wrote about it later that day.

He brought the entry home, steadily tearing it from his moleskin. He pinned it up with the others in the meticulous mess of a mantel. Her memorabilia plastered the wall. Photographs, yes, but mostly drawings. Cameras couldn't capture her the way he could. Isaac knew how her mood moved her muscles. He could replicate every strand of her hair,

even the fly-aways. The lighting tended to falsely accuse her of a too-messy bun or blotchy skin, but Isaac knew better. He always framed her perfectly.

She occasionally ate at the café. Her peach lipstick stuck to the “for here” mug one Sunday, leaving the imprint of her lips on the ceramic. It sat as a centerpiece on the wall. Isaac still searched for her shampoo, actively huffing the bottles in each isle. He planned to slowly drain the contents into the mug. It all felt so impersonal without her smell.

Isaac hoped her name started with a “J”. It would work out, seeing as his began with an “I”, which came right before “J”. It could start with anything, really. But if not with a “J,” then hopefully her name would have two syllables, like his.

Hopefully, she didn’t have a nickname. At least not a good one. Isaac made a list of sweet things to call her. Rosie, maybe, for Rose. Or Junebug for June; Katie for Kate. That would be okay, because he could make it two syllables.

The first time he visited her home, Isaac felt tempted to look at her mail. It sat in the industrial metal bowl on the coffee table. The front of any envelope would give the title to his masterpiece. A project complete, if only he knew her name.

He sat on her couch for the first time, fiddling with a throw pillow, staring at the table. Names rolled around Isaac's head: a long list of possibilities with favorites picked out. It took him an hour to leave, but he did so with peace of mind. He did not want to stumble upon it. He wanted her to tell him.

Eventually, she put a new lock on her door. One of those hardy ones, the hard to pick ones. Isaac spent a few moments fiddling around before scaling the fire escapes and climbing through the window. He didn't mind the extra work, so long as she felt safe in the midst of the city.

She wore leggings and large sweaters on Sundays, her shopping days. She dressed up on Mondays, Tuesdays sometimes too. She wore thin heels, pencil skirts, and sport coats. The latter part of the week consisted of dress pants and blouses. Isaac could sometimes see through the material. She wore long tee shirts, or tank tops with athletic shorts, to bed. If she ever painted her nails, they chipped within a few days. Orange, her favorite color, claimed her every throw pillow and vase. She made her bed every morning, tucking in the sheets and comforter. The lights and shelves received a dusting whenever her parents came to town. Isaac would sometimes do it for her, trying to reduce the allergies destined to attack her.

He almost spoke to her outside a club one night. She stepped out into the damp evening in ripped jeans and a crop top. He chuckled at the *NO THANKS* written boldly across her chest. He loved that: her determination to drive people away. It made their relationship all the more intimate.

She looked right at him. No hesitation in her glance. She looked right at him, and he knew she sensed where he stood. Just as he did with her.

Isaac stayed under the cover of a broken streetlight. He leaned on the peeling, rusted paint and beamed at her. The club's front light arched around her, making the sidewalk her stage. She stepped toward him, legs shaking as if from nerves or excitement. The emotions rang in him as well. He licked his lips. He suckled spit from between his teeth and gums, swallowing to lubricate his hoarse voice for conversation.

"Jessie! They're playing your song!" a voice called from the doorway. The inside beat wafted into the street. It seemed to make the light pulsate.

She stopped. Isaac strained against himself, holding back from running to her. Her muscles were equally clenched. Isaac saw the flex as eagerness. He watched her step inside, stranded as the club door closed.

His Jessie.

Lights on, Isaac swung the café sign to open.

Jessie came in toward the end of his shift, like always. But she looked... wrong. Hair unbrushed, she stood in sweatpants with red-rimmed, swollen eyes. Some girl's arm draped over her shoulder. Jessie ordered her usual, and her friend got the same.

"We're going straight to the police station, okay?" the other girl confirmed while Isaac prepared their drinks, "I don't know why you didn't do this sooner."

Jessie nodded at the girl, arms crossing over her chest like a shield. She smiled at Isaac when he presented the coffee. She'd never smiled at him before, not like that. The smile sunk into her teeth: half begging, half swallowed, more flatly stretched than curved. She never smiled like that. She needed him.

"Everything okay?" Isaac asked, bothered by her eye's tearful gleam. He never needed to speak to her, not like other people; their bond ran deeper than words. But for this stranger, the one crushing her shoulders, he would perform.

"Some guy has been following her for months."

"Maybe," Jessie whispered, sipping her drink. Even with the soft tone, her voice dripped from chapsticked lips like warm milk. Isaac wanted to bottle it up, pour it in the mug at home.

“That’s awful.” He leaned onto the bar, looking his Jessie in the eyes. He smiled, knowing she already knew, well, everything. “I hope everything is okay. I’ll make sure to keep an eye out for you, ya know, make sure you don’t disappear on us.”

Her shoulders dropped, tears falling. Isaac memorized the pattern to sketch later. It would go right above the mantle.

“Thank you so much.”

Poison Lust

Anais Mercedes

Stupid immunizations

Stupid confirmations

Little did she know

He was all hell and he was Satan.

If you're planning to stay, please don't tell me my smile is amazing.

Please don't compliment my body for obvious reasons.

The pain left for a minute then started stinging.

Obviously you don't care; you're just a man.

What can I expect?

You only want me for the sex.

My heart is MIA, it's out of reach.

My body is so cold, I can't feel my feet.

This man right here is just laughing at me.

Can't ever understand the pain you've worsened in me.

I'm done selling my soul, I can't even speak.

I'm so tired of small talk and petty penetrations.

I'm so tired of giving you my mind for humiliation.

Stupid man, who can you be?

Satan, why can't you see the pain you've worsened in me?

Don't go taking my last meal, then cursing at me.

Satan, you've been here bringing me down.

You've been smuggling the clouds.

The rain pours, yet I hear no sound.

The feelings I have are all about the stupid stinging in my mouth.



Samantha Longval

Perfection in Progress

Britney Brown

Xer looked around in confusion. “Where am I?” They asked aloud to no one in particular. They were in the middle of the desert with nothing in sight.

Xer began to panic. Taking deep breaths, they tried to make sense of all of this. How does any of this make sense? Short answer; it doesn’t.

Xer took a deep breath, “Okay, calm down.” They muttered to themselves. “This is probably just a dream-” They cut themselves off. They heard something strange.

“Fuck, this is the part that I hate most.” Xer heard in their head, but it wasn’t their voice, it was a female’s voice.

“Wha- who are you?” Xer asked, confused and upset.

“Who do you think I am?” the voice said. Xer could imagine the female, sitting in a chair, her hands on her lap, relaxed. Composed. Xer thought about her question for a moment before getting angry.

“You! You... You made me! I’m not real! This isn’t real! I don’t wanna be here!” Xer couldn’t wrap their head around this. Did they even

have a home? What was happening? Were they going crazy? Who were they? They could feel their chest heaving as oxygen came and left their body, but they couldn't feel any of the air circulating their body.

“Hey, hey, calm down, I don't need you to get traumatized yet. Trust me, you will love being alive.”

“What?!” Xer exclaimed in fear. Traumatized, what did that mean?? Adventures? “Tell me who you are!” Xer demanded. They could hear a pen being scratched on paper and heard some muttering. Xer could see a better image of themselves, their hair changed shape and color many times before finally deciding on black, smooth and short.

“Well, I suppose you could call me the creator. I don't really have a name.” Xer heard; how could she be so casual about this?

“Why did you make me?” Xer demanded.

“I didn't make you. I thought of you, you made yourself. Think about it. I don't know anything about you, and you don't know anything about yourself. We're learning about you together.”

“You're wrong,” Xer hissed back, hating how the creator could get into their head like that. “You made me. You can take me back. Stop this nonsense.”

“That's not how it works, and you know that.” The creator

replied. Xer imagined the creator, sitting upright now, her back straight, a notepad somewhere close to her with a pencil or pen in her hand.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Xer yelled into the sky. The sky that was plain, blue and white, littered with clouds. Xer was frustrated, there weren’t any buildings or roads, but everyone else around them seemed to be going places. Though they almost seemed like shadows. Hardly there. “You can control everyone and everything here!” Not that there was much of a ‘here’ anyway.

Xer began to walk, seemingly going nowhere. They didn’t have a destination in mind, and buildings seem to be trying to construct in front of them. “See? You’re trying to avoid this conversation!”

“I want the story to continue,” the creator said, monotonously.

“You don’t even know me very well! You haven’t given me a name, given me a sex! Do you even know what the story is about?”

“Of course I do, but I’m learning about you. I don’t know you very well because you are your own person. Right now, you are like a stranger I have just met and need to understand and know. Unfortunately, I came up with a storyline and not many characters. The story needs characters, though. Since we have a little bit of time, why don’t you tell me about yourself?”

Xer was taken aback. The creator was asking about them. To talk about themselves. But they didn't even know the first thing about themselves. "Shouldn't you already know that? You made me! I should be asking about you!"

"But I don't know you. You are simply a placeholder; I don't know anyone in this story yet. So why don't we begin with you? Who are you? What's your name? What do you sound like? Look like? What do you like to do? Like to eat? To drink? How old are you? Are you the protagonist? The antagonist?"

"Wait! Slow down, I don't even know what that means! How could you be asking me? I don't know the first thing about myself! Where am I? Who am I? What's my name?"

"Gosh, I never had anyone be so annoyed..." The creator sighed softly. "Hopefully, I can make this story. I'm sure you'll love being alive. You're not in my world, you're in the perfect world."

Bleeding Bead

Jasmine Tyrance

Deep into the dark,
Through the frigid current,
Searching for the one source
That brings warmth.

Within that gaping murk,
That bead of luster lies,
Rendering the wax,
Making it bleed more.

Comfort radiating from the light.
Protection from the bitterness in life.
Cold, unwrapped from the story,
Replaced with the heat of the bead.

The bleeding wax falls
Into the puddle of intense aroma.
A scent of relaxation
Lingers in the air.

The trickling pillar,
Emanates from the burning wick,
Rising from the bleeding wax.
Heat lingers from the blaze of fire.

The light burns with life,
And bleeds with feeling.



Nick Biron

The Mountain Devils

Steven Covey

In the dark forests of Denali National Park, a large truck made its way down an old gravel road. The truck drove on a logging road that, over the years, experienced lots of damage. Numerous potholes and debris littered the ground. He planned to drive to his hunting cabin in the remote mountains near Mount McKinley to hunt Dall Sheep for the next couple of days.

He had driven this road plenty of times and knew it like that back of his hand, but this happened to be his first year driving the road at night. He had always planned his hunting trips so that he could leave early in the morning and arrive at the cabin around dinner time. This year, he had a strange feeling that he should not go, but he ignored it and made the last-minute decision.

Back on the road, the man heard his satellite phone ringing. He reached over and answered it. “Hello,” he said.

“Hi Wyatt,” said the voice. “I just wanted to check in and make sure you’re at the cabin.”

Wyatt smiled as he responded. “Hi Abby. And no, I’m not there yet. I left late today, sometime around midafternoon.”

“Well I just put the kids to bed. They were asking about where you were. They were like, ‘Where’s daddy? We want to play with daddy,” said Abby.

Wyatt laughed, “Can you make sure you tell them that I’ll be back in four days and that I’ll bring them both a new sheep they can hang?”

“I will,” said Abby. “But just promise me you’ll be ok. There’s been a lot of missing person reports around Denali, and I’d hate for you to end up like that.”

“I promise I’ll come back, there’s no need to worry. I can handle myself,” he said, and turned his attention back to the road.

He glanced in his rear-view mirror. Noticing nothing at first, he turned his attention back to the road. Then he saw something move from behind the car. Looking back into the mirror, he could make out a silhouette of a man running. “No one is out here but me,” Wyatt said in disbelief. All of a sudden, the silhouette picked up its head and showed its glowing red eyes. Spooked by the eyes, Wyatt increased his speed. The silhouette kept pace with the truck. He sped up even more to forty-five miles an hour, but the silhouette still kept the pace. Wyatt floored the gas pedal and began to speed down the uneven road with the silhouette close behind. He looked at the tree line to see another silhouette running beside the truck. A large rock sailed from the tree line and slammed

against the hood of his truck. Startled, he swerved into a pothole and popped one of his tires. He began to lose control of his truck as it fishtailed in the middle of the road. Without noticing it, the truck blew another tire. Wyatt spun off the road, flipping the truck on its side.

Wyatt let out a painful moan as he lay in his seat, covered with broken glass and cuts from the impact. He unbuckled his seat belt and tried to pull himself up to reach the passenger door. He heard loud footsteps that echoed within the forest. Wyatt tried not to make any loud noises to avoid drawing attention as he reached for the passenger side door handle. As he pushed the door open slowly, something ripped it open and threw it across the road. Panicked, he reached for his knife as a large hairy arm reached into the car and ripped him out. Wyatt swung his knife around, only to be hit upside the head and fall unconscious.

The next day, Wyatt awoke in a cave, with shooting pains in his back, chest and legs. A small fire dwindled further within the cave, providing little light. He lay on his back and turned his head to see what else hid in the cave. Nothing but darkness and the small light that came from the fire. About ten feet away from him was the cave entrance. The idea of running out of the cave came across his mind, but that thought disappeared once he heard the same footsteps from before. His heart began to race as he trembled at the sound of something approaching the cave.

Looking back at the cave entrance, he saw a huge hulking beast carrying a grizzly bear on its shoulder. The beast dropped the bear and sat against the wall in the small amount of light shining into the cave. Wyatt looked at the beast's arms: they were covered with long brown hair and led to a gray, leathery hand with sharp claws on each of its five fingers. The beast's legs bulged with definition from its muscle, and more long brown hair covered it from the waist down to the foot. It had the broadest of shoulders but no neck. The head looked as if it sat in the middle of its shoulders. The face happened to be the most scarred of all its features. The beast had an enlarged underbite that showed off some of its sharp, blood-stained teeth. Its forehead protruded out, and its glowing red eyes sank into its skull. The beast's face had spots of hair that crisscrossed scars, indicating that this beast had been in lots of battles.

Wyatt froze as he sat just feet away from the hairy abomination. He could feel his heart beat out of his chest as he struggled to breathe. A numbing sensation came over him as the beast turned and looked at him, gazing into his eyes. Tears ran down Wyatt's face as the beast moved closer and closer. Different possibilities rushed around his head as he prayed not to be eaten. All of a sudden, two beasts rushed into the cave and tackled the larger one, who crawled his way closer to Wyatt. The two beasts seemed to be wrestling, rather than fighting with the other. Wyatt pulled himself closer to the wall to see the other two, but with

such little light, he could not make out much detail. After the wrestling stopped, one of the beasts walked past him and pulled the grizzly bear deeper into the cave. It looked smaller than the one that brought the grizzly bear into the cave, but it had the same features and the same glowing red eyes.

Wyatt lay there listening to them rip apart the bear and devour it. Soon night approached and the weak light in the cave vanished. He did not know what to do. For the moment, he felt a sense of fear that prevented him from bolting out of the cave. He planned to wait for the right time to make his move. Hours passed until he had his opportunity. He heard a pack of wolves' howl in the distance and the cry from some other animal. All of a sudden the beasts all bolted out of the cave and ran towards the wolves. Wyatt arose and ran out of the cave, heading in the opposite direction.

He had the moonlight to guide him as he jumped over fallen trees and leaped over rocks. He could hear the roar from the beasts like thunder in the distance. Wyatt felt adrenaline rush through his body as he sprinted through the forest. Five minutes passed, ten minutes passed, and he continued to sprint. He lost the fear of running into any other animals. He could have bumped into a grizzly, and he would not have cared. Suddenly, Wyatt's foot caught on a thorn bush and landed him onto the dirt road. Looking down both sides of the road and seeing the moonlight

shine on the left side, he made his decision and ran towards the light. He felt his heart pump out of his chest and his lungs collapse. Wyatt fell to the ground, gasping for air, but then he heard the faint roar of the beast. He sprinted as fast as he could down the road, not stopping for anything.

The pain from the car crash grew to become intolerable as he collapsed. He picked up his head and saw his busted truck lying on its side. He crawled over, hoping to find his guns. He found his handgun near the driver's seat and placed it back on his hip. He then crawled to the back to find his hunting rifle snapped into two pieces. Wyatt checked for his supplies only to find that they had disappeared. The faint roar from the beast grew louder, and Wyatt started running again. He rolled off the road and buried himself in the mud and leaves to hide. One of the beasts ran by minutes later. The big one with the blood-stained teeth had followed Wyatt and trotted by. It sniffed the air and continued running forward.

After the beast passed, Wyatt began to crawl deeper into the woods away from the road. He army crawled for over an hour until he reached a meadow. He shifted his way through the tall grass and heard rushing water. He made his way towards a fast-moving river and stuck his head into it, gulping as much water as he could. He felt a sense of security rush over him. After lying on the ground gulping water, Wyatt decided to stand up. He looked further upstream to see the big one,

crouching on the same side of the river. Seconds after he stood up, the beast noticed him and ran towards him, roaring like a banshee. Wyatt had no other choice but to plunge himself into the torrent.

He struggled to keep his head above the water as the beast followed him on the shore. He tried to swim towards the middle of the river, but the strong currents prevented him from moving. As he fell beneath the water, the beast continued to follow him. The river then turned into a waterfall, and he went over. He collided against the rocks on his way down but pulled himself back to the surface. The current grew faster as he went down another. He smashed his leg and felt a sharp pain as he tried to swim. The water flowed over him, pushing his head back under water. Once he reached the surface again, he fell down another waterfall. He felt his ribs break and his leg snap as he hit the rocks below. As Wyatt tried to reach the surface, the undercurrent knocked his head against one of the rocks, rendering him unconscious.

He awoke onshore with sharp pains in his ribs, legs, arms, and head. He felt his head and saw blood leaking onto his hand from his forehead. He pulled himself further onto shore and lay on his back, until he heard the sound of bushes rustling coming from the other side of the river. He picked his head up and saw the big one standing across from him. Wyatt watched as the beast paced around the shore roaring and throwing stones into the river. He mustered whatever strength he

had left to stand up. He reached for his gun and pointed it at the beast. The beast's red eyes widened once Wyatt revealed his gun and pulled the trigger. CLICK. His eyes widened as he realized that the gun had no bullets. All of a sudden Wyatt felt someone pull him back. He lost balance and fell to see a person in an orange coat firing arrows across the river. Exhausted, Wyatt watched as the beast ran off into the forest before passing out.

He awoke in a bed with bandages wrapped around his arms and legs. He scanned the room and saw the man in the orange coat stoking the fire.

"I see that you had a run in with the mountain devils," said the man in the orange coat.

"Now, what THE HELL are the mountain devils?"

"They're Bigfoot. Alaska's bigfoot and we call them the Nantiinaq. I'm Miska by the way."

Wyatt started to panic in disbelief. "So, Bigfoot is real? Do we even have a chance to escape? Are they going to hunt me down? What did they plan to do to me?" Wyatt began to break down. His cuts began to ooze more blood. Miska applied pressure to his wounds and tried to calm him down. But Wyatt demanded the truth. He wanted answers and wanted them now.

“Look, the Nantiinaq is real, and you are safe. My cabin is on the shores of the lake where the river empties and I’ve called for help. Don’t worry. Everything will be fine.”

Miska reached behind him and grabbed more bandages to wrap around Wyatt’s leg. The bleeding had stopped, but Miska wanted to make sure no more blood would slip out. Wyatt noticed that Miska avoided making eye contact, as if he had something to hide. “Have you heard about the missing people who vanish when visiting Denali?”

Wyatt’s eyes widened, “Yea, I’ve heard.”

“Well...” Miska started. “The Nantiinaq attacked and ate them. That’s why they brought you back to their cave. They usually feed on the Dall Sheep, but since more and more hunters come here to hunt them, the Nantiinaq become territorial and hunt the hunter instead.”

“Wait,” started Wyatt. “How do you know so much about these beasts? Certainly, your chiefs couldn’t tell you everything.”

“I’ve been hunting those beasts for years. I’ve killed at least fifty of them. Then I call the government and they take the bodies away. I know all this because I’ve been to their lair. They have this massive bone pile in the back, next to an ice wall. You were probably going to be their next snack.”

“Well, I’ve been to their cave, and I do remember that there was

a small fire. How smart are these creatures?”

“They’re smarter than you and me but act primitive,” started Miska. “The government official who comes to retrieve the bodies tells me how some of them act.”

All of a sudden, the two men could hear large rocks being thrown at the cabin. “What the hell is going on!” Wyatt shouted.

“They’ve come back for you. Go under the bed and don’t come out. I’ll take care of this!” Miska said as he armed himself with his bow and arrows. He ran over to the door and locked it before he pulled his first arrow back and aimed out the only window in the cabin. They could hear the big one let out bone-chilling roars as it slammed into the cabin. Miska continued firing arrows, which only made the beast shake the cabin more. With every arrow he shot out the window, the beast would throw a rock into the cabin.

The beast shook the cabin until it moved it off its foundations. Soon the whole cabin began to rumble. Miska stopped firing arrows and began barricading the window and door. The big one kicked down the door, grabbed Miska, and slammed him against the wall. It roared in his face and ripped his left arm off. Hearing Wyatt, the big one pulled him out from underneath the bed by the back of his head. Wyatt screamed as he swung his knife around, slicing the beast’s arm. Blood gushed from the

big one's arm as he covered Wyatt's mouth and slammed his head against the wall.

The beast yanked Wyatt and Miska out of the cabin. It then sprinted back to the cave as the sound of the float plane grew louder. Besides a destroyed cabin, the big one left a footprint in the softened ground. Once at the cave, they feasted on Wyatt and Miska until their clothes were the only thing that remained. After the feast, the big one arose and brought the clothes to the back of the cave where a large pile of torn clothing and broken bones remained.

Marriage

Sam Passamonte

She is a loaded gun
ready to fire at anyone
that breathes the wrong way.

He is an empty bottle.
Pouring nothing into
Those around him.

We are leaves on trees
In the fall
Hanging on by a thread.

We tie a knot
Around our fingers
And around our hearts
Desperately trying to
Hold us together
But nothing seems to work

We splinter off into piles
Full of every angry word
We've ever said.

Anger is all we know
Engrained in us when
we were young

We do not know
Love.
Joy.
Compassion.

But we do know
Anger.
Hatred.
How to fight.

We fight with every muscle
In our body like it's World War 3
We fight until our throats hurt
And our eyes grow weary.

But we never apologize.
We never forgive.
It builds up inside us
Until there isn't enough
Space for us to breathe.



Eman Taha

A White Feather on the Front Porch

Zach Daniels

It was early in the morning when a most unwelcome guest arrived at the Poisson household. Henry first noticed her watching him through the kitchen window as he sat down for his morning coffee. It had been two years since her last visit, and the timing of her return could not have been worse. He stared back at her with sadness as he finished his drink, before calling his uncle to tell him of the arrival.

“She’s back, Kevin. Showed up this morning.”

“Who’s back?”

“Morticia. I’m looking at her right now. She’s perched on the branch above the garden, same as always.”

“Are you sure it’s her? Are you absolutely sure it’s her?”

“Yes, I’m sure. Are you with my Mom right now?”

“No, I’m going to see her this afternoon. Tell your siblings to meet me there and I’ll call everyone else.”

The conversation ended, and Henry rang-up Donna and Mary to tell them of Morticia’s arrival and to meet the rest of the family at the hospital to visit their mother. They did not receive the news well,

as he expected. Henry tried to avoid looking out the window as he tidied up the house, knowing that everyone would be wanting to see for themselves that Morticia had returned.

The silence in his mother's room was unnerving. It was never quiet when the Poisson family got together, but now, with death on everyone's minds, no one could speak a word. Henry leaned over his mother's bed and planted a kiss on her cold, pale forehead.

"Mom... Mom I..."

"I know, honey. I know."

"They told you?"

"There is nothing that needs to be said for me to know why you all have come to visit. I've known Morticia my whole life, and now she has come for me."

Henry and his sisters couldn't hold back their tears as they mourned the imminent death of their mother. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and children all stood in silence as the three siblings tried to process what was to come. A few hours passed before his mother grew too tired and had to rest, at which point everyone left the room and set off for the family home. Charlette, Donna's daughter and Henry's niece whom he had grown very close to, asked if she could ride with her uncle. She sat in the back seat, quietly hoping that he would say something, but he

could not. He drove home in silence and parked the car before taking Charlette's hand as he brought her to the back porch.

The two sat and stared out over the gardens in the back yard. Henry gave his niece's hand a squeeze and sorrowfully directed her gaze to the branch of the old oak tree that sat above the lilies.

"Do you remember her?"

"I do. She's beautiful," Charlette paused as if she was unsure whether or not to ask the question that had been on her mind, "Uncle Henry, why is she here?"

"She's a part of the family, and... and when one of us is ready to move on--" he could not get the words out. A tear began to fall down his cheek.

Soon the sound of car doors opening and closing filled the air as the rest of the family joined them on the porch. There were more here now than there had been earlier at the hospital. Many of them had been at church that morning and couldn't make it, though they had made sure to send their prayers to Ellaine. The conversations were soft and most of the older relatives stood quietly while the children, too young to understand the gravity of the situation, played around in the fields.

Henry's sisters came to his side as they all gazed up at the large, white, snowy owl with gorgeous gold-trimmed feathers and a black

capped head. Even before the Poissons had moved to America more than a century ago, she had always arrived to signify that a member of the family would soon pass away. This time it was obvious that she was there to usher their mother into the afterlife.

It was the same each time Morticia returned for one of them. The bird sat on her branch until the person she had come for was ready to move on, at which point she'd fly onto the front porch to perch above the doorway. There, Morticia would drop a single white feather before flying off to guide the soul of the departed up to Heaven.

The immediate family stayed for dinner that night to share their favorite stories and memories of their time with Ellaine. When Morticia had come two years before to take their father, it was not so evident that he would be the one to go. Now, it almost felt like a luxury to know that their mother would finally find peace after her long battle with cancer. Henry's sisters and their kids stayed the night so they could be there the next day should the feather drop. But when morning came, Morticia still remained on her perch above the garden. Donna and Mary went home to get ready for the week but made sure to stop by each morning to check on both Morticia and their brother. Each day they did, and each day Morticia was still there, waiting for the moment their mother was ready to move on.

Soon a week had passed, and still there was no feather. Henry told his sisters that they need not check-in each day and that he would call them when the time had come. The children visited their mother every night to see how she was doing, and each time they found that her condition remained the same. When Donna stopped by on the second Friday after Morticia's arrival, she found her sister there as well.

“How are you feeling, Mom?”

“Oh, I feel fine. You know that you two don't need to keep coming. I know it hurts to see me like this, and I know you both love me.”

“Mom, it's no burden for us to come and see you. We want to see you. We... We don't want you to go.”

“I know. I know. But I'm worried that your brother is struggling with all this. He hasn't been by for the last two days. Don't be mad at him though, girls. I told him the same as you: my pain will soon end and there is no reason for you to keep visiting if it makes your heartache any worse.”

The sisters stayed there for a while before saying what they hoped would not be their last goodbye. The next day, Donna decided to bring Charlette to her brother's house, in hopes that they could help cheer him up. Her daughter quickly jumped out of the car and ran to the

back porch to see the bird with whom she had become fascinated. Donna rang the doorbell, but no one answered. A moment later, her daughter came running around the corner.

“Mom, Morticia’s not sitting on her branch.”

The child’s expression changed to one of unease as she shifted her gaze to her mother’s feet. Donna looked down, her heart sinking as she caught sight of the white feather on the doorstep. She frantically searched for her phone to call Mary.

“The feather dropped. Mom’s gone.”

“What are you talking about? I’m sitting next to her right now. Is Morticia gone?”

“Yes, she’s... She’s gone. But... But the feather--”

Donna ended the call and began pounding on the door. Charlette walked onto the porch and picked up the feather as her mother dialed another number into her phone. Henry’s ringtone began to play on the other side of the front door, but no one answered.

“Mommy, should we go to the hospital and see if grandma is okay?”

“I don’t know, Charlette. I want you to go wait for me in the car, all right? I’ll be right back.”

Donna pulled out her spare key as she watched to make sure her daughter got into the car. She pushed open the door, fearing she would find that it had been her brother whom Morticia had taken away from them. Her fingers punched in his number again, and she followed the sound of Henry's ringtone into the kitchen where his phone was sitting on the counter. Before Donna got a chance to search the rest of the house, the sound of a car door closing stole her attention. In an instant, she was already out on the front porch to stop Charlette from walking inside and possibly finding her uncle dead.

"Donna, what are you doing here?"

"Where have you been? Henry, the feather dropped, and I couldn't find you. I thought you were dead."

"Hey, Charlette. How about you go pick us some flowers from the garden while me and your mom have a quick chat?"

Henry sat his sister down as he explained what had happened. How there had not been a feather that morning. That he had run into their uncle at the store, only to watch as he dropped to the ground moments later from a heart attack. The EMTs had pronounced him dead right there in the grocery aisle.

As horrible as seeing that all unfold in front of him had been, Henry couldn't help but acknowledge that it meant there was still hope

for their mother to pull through. Donna and their uncle had always been close, but even she could not ignore the fact that it gave them more time to spend with their mother, and Uncle Kevin had been ten years older than Ellaine. Charlette soon came back to the front with a bouquet of bright lilies and gave them each one of the white flowers.

“Don’t worry, Mommy. Grandma’s not gonna leave yet,” she said as Donna wiped the remaining tears from her eyes; “I think Morticia dropped the feather by mistake because she’s back in the tree.”

It Is

Sabrina DiSorbo

It is a strength, a will, a desire.

It is a laugh trapped in a fast-beating heart.

It is a flash, a shot, a poison.

It is a broken memory biting at your eyes.

It is bravery, perseverance, dedication.

It is heroic kindness rising over cruelty.

It is fear, avoidance, selfishness.

It is greed for the self, crushing all else.

It is love, it is hate.

It is lightness and darkness.

It is swirling, twisting in our minds.

I only wonder if it is truth.



Samantha Robinson

Afterlife

Alex O'Bryan

It's early spring on a Saturday morning in Franklin, Tennessee. It's not very fun around here, although we are known for our music, history galore, and southern charm. It gets boring after you've gone to every annual event at least sixteen times. My house is right down the road from David's Barbeque Joint, home of authentic Southern BBQ. My brother Gus, my mama, and I head over there from time to time if the money is looking steady for the week. We adore that place. They have our order memorized: three smoked brisket sandwiches with a dollop of slaw.

The three of us live in a cozy and dusty three-bedroom, one-bathroom shack, painted a pastel green, with paint chips crumbling off the shingles. We've got a farm, one hundred acres of pure green grass all the way to the woods. It's really the only thing I like about our place, Gus too. Sometimes him and I walk out in the field and just sit there. He'll look at me sometimes with those green eyes and his musty overalls and say "Sarah, when did you get so damn smart? Here I am shucking' corn and you're polishing' your fancy scalpels." I laugh and he looks off into the horizon, brushing back his auburn locks and fumbling his fingers into his front pockets.

There are chickens, pigs, one horse and two cows. Oh, and I can't forget about Buddy, my dog. He's a funny one, my Buddy, with his coffee brown spots above his timid eyes and white spots speckled on his chest. Some French Brittanys have that pattern.

I never knew anything about my father, other than the fact that he did a lot of drugs. From what I can tell, he wasn't worth knowing anything about. The last thing I heard of him was that he overdosed somewhere in downtown Chicago behind the dumpster of a Denny's.

Mom made her famous cheese omelette, and the kitchen stinks of bacon. The birds chirp close to the rusty old window, flying away as I walk closer. My coffee is ready and I'm about to leave for my shift at Wilson Memorial hospital. They need me on Sundays because most of my co-workers have kids and families they attend church with and go to a fancy brunch afterwards. Not me, I'm still single and living at home.

"Sarah, you oughta eat somethin' before you go, can't have you passing out at work," Mama Walsh says, shuffling across the scratched wood floor. Her short, dark brown hair is always kept nice and brushed out. She's always looking out for me, worrying about me. I think she thinks I'm depressed. Maybe I am. The only reason I'm able to work at a hospital is because I worked my butt off in school, earning a full ride to Tennessee State College. My goal is to make enough money to get my mama and Gus out of this shithole, our shithole.

I pop a piece of chewy, greasy bacon in my mouth, swipe a paper plate of eggs filled with jalapeno cheddar, carry it out to the green family Honda, and drive off. Getting off the exit, I peer into my rearview mirror and spot an accident on the side of the road. It's a pretty darn good wreck. Smoke seeping up into the atmosphere. I sit in frustration, knowing I'll have to deal with this traumatic event within a few hours. I'm a surgeon, and I've worked very hard to get where I am. I save lives every day, but I also lose them. That's the hard part.

I clock in while I wave at my co-workers, Jen and Chrissy, who are both at the doughnut and coffee station. It's nice that they offer that here, but it's always the same doughnut options, original glazed and Boston cream. I open up my coffee cup and fuel up with the darkest roast, not adding cream or sugar. Jen is a soft spoken, timid woman with long black hair tied back into a tight parted ponytail. It's really tight, too; she must use helmet head or something because not a wisp is present, especially in the operating room. Chrissy is our assistant; she's small, quiet and has short, dirty-blond hair that she bobby pins back when she's helping out in the OR. She kind of follows me and Jen around, and we let her. Jen and I work well together in the OR. Just last week, we had a patient roll in after a biking accident. Kid sprained his wrist, we had him out of there all casted up in about twenty minutes.

“Walsh, I need you and Jen in OR number sixteen, stat,” my

boss says. He looks flustered with his white coat drifting behind him from how fast he's walking. My boss is a tall, loud, sweet son of a bitch. When he gets really stressed, his left eye twitches a little, quite funny actually. Many people in the hospital call him robot behind his back. I just call him Robert, and I call him that to his face.

Jen and I hurry down the hospital hallway to see what we're dealing with. We give each other a glance and speed up when we hear violent moans. As we approach the gurney, we discover a man who appears to have a decent sized gash in his mid-section. He's a pretty heavy guy. We roll him into the OR while stripping him down. We have to cut off his blue button-down shirt and rip his shorts off. As we inspect his wounds, we flip him over, revealing a smaller gash on the back of his calf. Jen takes a closer look as we're prepping the room for surgery.

"Sarah look at this, it seems to be a bite mark." Jen says with a frightened look in her big brown eyes. I inch closer quickly to examine his leg wound, and Jen's right. There are teeth marks on his leg. He's writhing in pain, begging for us to make it stop.

"Please. It's burning! Oh God, make it stop!" he shouts.

I assure the man he is going to be okay, and we'll fix him up right away. We begin disinfecting the odd bite mark on his leg. That's the wound losing the most blood and it is the most concerning, considering we have no idea who or what bit him. As I'm applying disinfectant and

gauze, the wound begins to throb. I see the blood pumping behind the gash, and his heart must be going a mile a minute because he can't seem to catch his breath. His wounds hadn't seemed that bad, which is why Jen and I are confused as to why he's so hysterical.

"We will have you fixed up in no time, sir; I just need you to calm down," I sternly say. His eyes immediately go from being half closed to wide open as he moans in pain. His pupils dilate to the maximum; he's going into shock.

"Chrissy, grab me a sedative!" I holler across the OR. Chrissy rushes to the lime green countertop, rifling through all the different medications for surgeries. Jen turns around to rush her because she doesn't work well under pressure. They're both at the counter, so it's up to me to keep this man tamed until he gets put under.

"Chrissy, Jen, I'm not getting any younger over here, come on!" I yell in frustration as the man's eyes reach the size of two golf balls.

While I'm looking over at Chrissy and Jen for half a second to see their progress, the man lunges toward me ravenously. He's grunting now, breathing heavier than before, and I can feel his body temperature rising like a furnace. He grabs my left wrist with such force that my whole hand goes numb.

"Sir, we are doing everything we can! You need to calm down!" I yell. Jen and Chrissy whip their heads toward me and run over to help.

The man is out of control. Jen reaches to pry him off me. He pierces his fingers into her scalp and extends his neck, attempting to sink his teeth into her neck. Jen screams. Chrissy faints. I almost faint. I holler for security to come into the OR and restrain the man.

After security removes the man, I look at Jen's face. It's full of even more terror than before. She went from olive toned to a shade of pale white. It made me wonder if she would ever return to work, considering she has such bad anxiety. Chrissy was in the locker room trying to wake up, and I could hear her faint voice trying to cry while she hyperventilated.

"You don't understand... I'm not built for this. I'm just an intern! Please, please, let me go home! I just want to go home!" she squalled. I feel overwhelmed by everyone around me freaking out.

Jen, Chrissy, and I clock out early. I hop into the green mobile and drift down the highway, arriving home in under fifteen minutes. I screech into the dirt driveway, check the white rusty mailbox for Mama and then immediately walk inside. Mama is fixing my favorite after-work sandwich: salami, turkey and American cheese on toasted rye. She always puts a little butter on the top of the bread for me, she knows I like that. Gus, on the other hand, likes peanut butter and jelly on fluffy white bread. Mama still cuts his sandwich into two triangles and cuts off the crust. Ever since we were little kids, she's made those exact

sandwiches for us whether for comfort, celebration, or just after school. Now, it's just an everyday tradition. Gus and I are a lot alike despite our differences in taste for food. I love seafood, he wouldn't eat it if his life depended on it. He likes liver, and me? I couldn't eat that slop if it was the last thing I did. My brother Gus has and always will have my back. I remember one time when some of the girls in my third-grade class were pushing me around while calling me a hick, he pulled up on his dirt bike and splashed a mud puddle onto the three of them. They screamed, I giggled.

“How was work, Lovie?” Mama asks me.

“It was alright, more of the same,” I reply, not wanting to worry her.

I snag the remote and go to news channel eight. Reporter Ted Miller is standing in front of the grocery store in Franklin, explaining that a woman in the center of town went crazy. She'd taken a pan off the sale rack of the corner grocery and tried slamming it into someone's head.

“Then the forty-year-old woman passed out, woke up and went after a man biting him on the arm,” Ted Miller states. I look up at the old boxy television and start to get suspicious. This story is oddly similar to what happened at work today. Unexplained crazy behavior and people

acting like animals. Maybe it's a new drug, I think to myself. People will do anything to get high.

I shut off the television and finish up my sandwich, go into my room, and change out of my scrubs. In the middle of changing, I look out the window into the field at all the pretty colors of the trees and flowers. What a wonderful life I live. I have a beautiful family, beautiful property and beautiful animals. I decided to go down to the barn and brush out my favorite animal, Bessy. Bessy is my horse. We got her for free from this crackhead that lives down the road from us. She was all mangy when we first got her, but she's a beautiful and bright mocha brown now. It took old Bessy a while to get used to us, but we've had her for seven years, so she feels comfortable enough to nestle her big head onto the gate, waiting to be pet on the top of her head.

When I go into the barn, I sense something isn't right. I don't see Bessy eating her hay and being lively. She's lying down on the bottom of the stable breathing all heavy. Bessy's eyes are no longer the kind, brown color they've always been. They're a deep and violent red. I go to open the stable and check on her, but she seems to have taken her last breath.

"Bessy! Bessy?" I cry. She's gone. My horse is gone just like that. That's when I know that what happened at the hospital and on the news was just the beginning. I run back to the house to tell mama and

Gus about Bessy; I yell for the both of them. Nothing. No one answers me.

“Hello?” I scream.

Nothing. I look in both of their rooms, the bathroom, and even the closet. I’m by the window and I hear an aggressive engine. I lift the curtain and see a military tank driving away. I run outside to chase it down but the entire town seems to have been evacuated.

I am completely and utterly alone. I am left behind in my hometown which seems to be falling apart, along with the rest of the world.

Tears roll down my hot cheeks from my intense fear. My legs quiver like thin strings of spaghetti. Oh, my mama’s spaghetti, with the grilled chicken pieces and parmesan cheese grated over it! Always in my favorite pink bowl. I may never eat that again.

“Hello?” I whisper.

“HELLO?” I push another breath out of my tired lungs. I think to myself, “Why would Mama and Gus just leave like that? Why? I love them so much and I know damn well they didn’t leave me behind on purpose.”

I’m alone in my own thoughts. Not like when I’m at Wilson Memorial, four black coffees deep, and stressed. I don’t understand.

I'm all by myself. I don't even have Bessy...The thought pangs inside my brain and rattles there for a minute as I collect myself in a reverse spaghetti form. My whole body is now made of uncooked spaghetti, harder than cooked pasta but extremely brittle and able to break in a second.

Suddenly, I hear the jingle of a collar and the pitter-patter of paws on the front porch. Buddy presents himself with a loud woof, and I break. My arms wrap around his soft curls and he comforts me with sloppy licks. This is it, it's Buddy and me against the world.

He trots along on my left side as I gather my belongings. In my stitched brown duffel bag, I place bags of tortilla chips, everything from canned beans to corned beef hash from the fridge for Buddy. His dog food makes its way in there too, along with extra clothes, my orange blanket and the rifle that I shot my first buck with. Buddy shoves his snout into the bag, and I pat him on the head, assuring him he'll get his corned beef later.

"We gotta get a move on, Bud," I mutter with a smirk.

Buddy and I need to find civilization. I need to find my family. I have to. Buddy's soft fur brushes up against me as I kick open the screen door. I open the car door for Buddy to hop into the passenger seat next to me. Although I have Buddy, I have no one to talk to. I mean, Buddy listens, but that's it.

We're about halfway past the Franklin town line. I haven't seen any form of civilization. Just bodies on the streets. Eventually, I decided to get out of the car and go into the market for a few more supplies, considering I had no idea how long Buddy and I would be on the road. I let Buddy out so he can take a leak. I needed to myself. Prying open the market doors, Buddy finishes up behind a tree stump and hurries to catch up with me. He stays close, protecting me. The rainbow of fruit is all still fresh, stacked nicely and the refrigerators are running fine. I grab fresh apples and bananas. I find as many containers of food as possible, from microwave meals to uncooked meat. I can make a mean chicken sandwich. One for me and one for Buddy.

Buddy nudges my leg while I'm hoarding food. He gives me that look. The look that means I need to pay attention to him or give him a treat. Although this time, I don't think he wants me to pay attention to him. I hear shuffles and moans. Breaths that sound almost final. Buddy begins barking so loudly it's piercing my ears.

There's a woman in a hairnet and a white jacket lurching my way. She must work in the deli. As she approaches, I notice she's walking like she's just taken a couple shots of bullet bourbon, something my dad used to drink. Nasty stuff.

Buddy's barking louder, my heart starts beating faster, and the woman hasn't said a word to me, but she's closer. Her face becomes

clearer. There's some skin that seems to have peeled off the left side of her face and she keeps clenching her jaw. She's clicking her teeth together loud enough for me to hear over Buddy's barking. I back away, eventually dropping the red delicious apples onto the waxy floor. The woman trips over one of them, falling onto the ground. Her name tag reads, 'Amelia.'

Whoever Amelia had been seems to be gone. Her body language was equivalent to the man in the hospital. Unexplained aggression as she tried getting up. She's crawling toward me while I watch her struggle, not knowing what to do. Buddy gets closer to her; I yell at him to back off. She grabs Buddy by his head, and I scream.

"BUDDY!" I kick the woman right in the face. Grabbing Buddy by his collar, I make my way back to the car. The woman's face looks sunken in now. She gets up to chase us. 'Get to the door.' I think to myself. She's right behind us, swiping at the air. She's angry and hurt. I get to the glass door, and when she catches up, I slam it as hard as I can on her.

She forces the door open and continues chasing Buddy and me. I see my rifle in the backseat of the car. I make it to the car door, swing it open and cock back my rifle. She's limping but running. She's about four feet away. I take a good look at her face one more time and come to realize she's already dead. Some kind of disease has spread to make

people crazy like this.

I shoot her right between the eyes. Her body drops to the ground.

“I’m so sorry,” I exhale.

I open the door for Buddy, get in and start up the car. Peeling out of the parking lot, I don’t know what to do next. I need people. I need a group. I can’t be out in the open like this all by myself. There’s still enough food in the back for Buddy and me to last a while. I pass the exit and plan to find civilization. It makes no sense how everyone can be gone so fast. All while I was with my dying horse, the whole world fucking evaporated. Buddy sees me crying and places his snout on my lap, looking at me with those eyes. The sun’s going down.

“You’re hungry, huh?” I say, expecting him to respond. I’m pretty damn hungry myself. I get off exit 18 and park near a shabby bus station about five miles down the road. I pull the corned beef hash out of my bag and rip off the lid. I forgot forks, goddamnit. I begin eating with my hands and give some to Buddy. While stuffing my face, I look out the window and see headlights. There’s a bus. ‘People!’ I think to myself.

Even though I’d only been on my own with no people around for less than a day, it felt like an eternity. Abandoned houses, streets and spaces that used to be filled with human interaction: gone.

The creaky bus doors swing open. Feet stumble down the steps. I squint my eyes to see that the bus is filled with people with unexplained, ravenous behavior. They duplicate one by one, making their way closer to Buddy and me. I stand in front of Buddy, but he tries to protect me by standing up straight with his chest puffed out.

“Buddy, no!” I squeal. Buddy jumps onto one of the disheveled looking men as I feverishly dig through the backseat for my rifle. I turn around and Buddy has sunk his teeth into him, attempting to rip him to shreds. I panic. I sweat. I cock back my rifle yet again. I aim at the man trying to eat Buddy alive. I can feel everything and nothing at the same time. I feel as dead as the world around me.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The shots didn’t come from my gun. They came from a double-barreled shotgun. Auburn highlights shine in the streetlights. A dirt covered face. Overalls.

One by one the insane people were tagged. There’s only one person I know that’s a better shot than me. Buddy gallops over to the gun source and tackles it. I sprint over, dropping my rifle to the ground.

It was now Buddy, Gus, and me, against the world.

To the One

Anais Mercedes

Maybe one day
I will forget the day we met
Maybe one day
I will forget every 'I love you'
Maybe one day
I will forget the names you called me
Maybe one day
I will forget the mental abuse you've put me through
But maybe I won't.
Those long nights on the phone have meant nothing.
You're a skeleton of memories, decaying across the cemetery.
Maybe. Just because you tell me you love me,
doesn't mean anything
when you've opened my heart in operation and detached it from my
body.
But just because you came back and added a sprinkle of glitter on my
dead body
doesn't mean you've fixed me!
Now, every 'I love you' will be a part of backseat conversation,
and I'll be buried under the back of my truck where we basically said
our 'I Do's.'
Now what was once a fairytale story,
we mourn.

Refusing to give me CPR, refusing to accept me as a person.

You caused a death to our future.

I've tried so hard, but whose grave do I visit when I miss you?

Cause you're not really dead.



Nick Biron

Contributors

Britney Brown is a Creative Writing major graduating in the year 2023. They are from Pawtucket, R.I. and love seriously creepy and weird things.

Eric Bruno is a senior in Creative Writing from Bedford, N.H. who hopes to graduate at the end of this spring semester. A Byronic Hero in the first degree, he's learning that being a hopeless romantic is a great motivator when it comes to sitting down to write.

Nick Biron is a Graphic Design and Media Arts major from Manchester, N.H. who enjoys graphic design, illustration, and photography. He has won 1 gold key and 4 silver keys in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards.

Steven Covey plans to be a Creative Writing major and will graduate in 2023. He is a freshman from Manchester, N.H. and loves to hike the White Mountains. He also enjoys learning about Bigfoot and other unexplained phenomenon.

Zack Daniels is a Creative Writing major from Bow, N.H. He is not creative enough to write something funny here and chose to write this instead. Hopefully he'll graduate in the spring of 2020, but who knows.

Sabrina DiSorbo is a Forensic Psychology major, ready to graduate in 2021. She is reclusive, preferring the company of nature and words over people.

Billy Furdon is a sophomore majoring in Marketing. His hobbies include photography and videography.

Zach Gillespie is studying Biology and plans to graduate in 2023. He

grew up in Baltimore, Maryland. His name was picked out of a hat and he likes to play video games and soccer.

Curtis Glover is a junior at SNHU studying Video Game Art and Design. He lives in New Hampshire and enjoys creating stories focusing on dark fantasy, fantasy horror, and horror.

Kelly Ladouceur is an end-of-year Sophomore studying Biology with plans to continue to get her license as a Physician's Assistant. She lives in Goffstown, N.H. Her passions include writing her life story as a sassy divorced woman and finding her way through life. She also contributes to the world by making people laugh at her own expense.

Samantha Longval is studying Graphic Design and Media Arts at SNHU, graduating in 2021. She lives on Lake Winnisquam in N.H. and loves the beauty of nature. Through hiking, she can capture beautiful moments on her camera and bring them to life with a paintbrush.

Anais Mercedes is studying Psychology and minoring in Sociology. She's graduating in 2021, is from Bronx, N.Y., and is the oldest of five siblings. Anais has been vegan for three years and has been writing poems for many years.

Alex O'Bryan is a first-year student from Newtown, CT, graduating in 2023. She is majoring in International Business and has always had a passion for writing. She loves sloths and dream interpretations.

Sam Passamonte is majoring in English Language and Literature and will be graduating in December of 2020. She is from Pelham, N.H. and loves animals, travel, and reading.

Sam Robinson is a graphic design major from Wakefield, MA.

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Jasmine Tyrance is a senior Creative Writing major from Nashua, N.H. who loves writing fiction and poetry. She collects small dragon statues because she sees them as the most invincible creatures in the world. Jasmine's dream is to become a published author.

Ruth Way is a senior at Southern New Hampshire University studying Creative Writing and Communication with a minor in Video Production. She loves reading, going to the gym, and enjoying the outdoors. She hopes to be a published author one day who creates a community with her writing.