The Sierra Journal is a student project and it features the work of Sierra College students. It is a book for the students and created by students. A true celebration of what Sierra College students have accomplished this year!
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This is About Us // Wendah Alvarez
AUTUMN EVENING // CHRISTINA LAROCHE
SUNK INTO A DREAM //
MENDOMAS ARTS

Sunk into a dream
A beast raced in
as if to be feared
but came about gentle
with guiding phrases
“Speak in ease child,
just let them be.”
Through a foyer
I traveled,
columns, marble
white,
beige from sleepy eyes,
black inlays of northern stars
upon the floor.
European vanity,
baroque molding
twenty feet
of vaulted
wooden skies.
A garden full of life,
orchard rows viewed
through pictured panes
Dusk spread
as the sky turned
amber-red with design.
Wandered I
down narrow halls
warmed by fire
emergent
within a hearth
Each room held a false
The Creature rushed again
fear did not chill me once
“Child they are alike,
just love and let them be.”

A smile, giggling hope
multiplied over my cells
I traversed though the halls
checked in on human race
lies and deceit filled each room
I knew I did not live as them
I live in love within her arms
I came into a room
feast laid out
cherry table top
linens,
porcelain china
edged in silver,
cabernet filled
to crystal brims.
A supper was to be shared
I did not dare to partake
a meal of bread and wine
decadence in savory warmth.
BEAUTY IS EVER FLOWING // HEATHER GOULD

PIECE OF SYMPHONY // HEATHER GOULD
Tell me again that it’s okay,
that what happened was nothing,
that I should be used to this;
because “I’m pretty”.
Tell me again and act like it was nothing.
Tell me that I’m crazy for being uncomfortable.
Tell me that he was nothing,
that he doesn’t matter,
that he won’t be the last.
That obviously made it better,
so why don’t you tell me again?
Tell me again
how I’m the one whose wrong,
even though my ass was already groped
while he gets off with high fives
and hollers around from his friends.
Tell me again that it’s alright,
that this should be normal for me.
That this doesn’t matter,
that even though he wasn’t the first
and that he won’t be the last.
Why don’t you tell me again
that either way it doesn’t matter,
that it will never matter
because “I’m pretty”.
Tell me again, as I sit here
begging the universe to make me disappear
to make me anyone and take me anywhere,
but me here.
Tell me again while
I walk to the exit
with this plastic smile
that you’ve made normal.
“get used to it”
“it’s nothing”
“just a peck”
“just a tap”
tell me again,
that these things are okay
because “I’m pretty”.

TELL ME AGAIN // HAYLEY PORTER
HUNTING SUNRISE
BREANNA JOHNSON
The cabin is small but comfortable. That’s why I chose it. The bare wooden walls and padded floor offer little in way of distraction. The scent of burning mold fills my lungs with a warm musk as the fire crackles in its hearth. Supplies for my endeavor are laid out on a table beside the easel. There are brushes, acrylics, towels, water, food and anything else that I might need lying on its rough, paint stained surface. Resting on the easel’s narrow shelf is a 28x36 stretch of ‘professional quality’ bleached canvas, if you believe the label.

My hands are itching to begin though I haven’t even begun to formulate what I wish to place on the canvases stark surface. Unable to wait any longer, they jerk for the brush cup and come back with a thick #10, bold strokes.

I don’t know how long this hunger has been inside me. The dam is broken and it can’t be stopped until the flood of paint runs its course. I’ve been afraid to put brush to paper again. I think the need to do so has been building in me ever since the accident, maybe even before that.

It wasn’t my fault you know. We both had a few drinks, maybe a few more than we should have. Whenever alcohol touches your lips, everything is your fault right? I don’t think I could have seen that truck coming on my driest day. There was no way to stop it, no way to avoid it. I couldn’t have had that much because I still remember every detail, every drop of rain.

The world seemed to slow down in the seconds before he hit. My brain kicked into overdrive and concocted a thousand ways to escape but not one that gave us enough time. I was powerless to do anything but throw out my hands and shield your precious head.

Could I have done more? Maybe.

I suppose my first mistake was being human. We’re much too fragile.

I remember the terror as the roof of the car came jutting down, crushing us both. The pain, terrible as it was, is a memory quickly forgotten. Not so easily forgotten is the sensation of your life being smothered away between my palms. I don’t think that I’ll ever forget that.

I’m already a mess. I have paint smeared all down both of my arms. The front of my shirt is sagging with the weight of cold, wet colors.

The base has turned out as a dark swirling gray with highlights of vibrant blue. Its certainly taken form but I still have no idea what it will be. Not allowing me a moment to think, my hands set about mixing new colors. They have developed a mind of their own. They move independently of thought and even against my will. I have as much control of them now I did over the clouds that shaped that storm.

Could it be that you’re the one guiding my hands?

No, this touch is cold. Yours has only ever been gentle and warm. Not even in my darkest imaginings could your spirit invite such icy wretchings and violent strokes. Whatever darkness was sent upon me isn’t guided by you. It is surely feeding upon your memory like a leach feasts on blood, drawing poison to the surface.
I think back to that last argument we had. You lived just long enough to break my heart twice. I remember your words and just like that your voice is in the cabin with me.

“He knows what we’ve done so we can’t see each other anymore. Stay away from me. We can’t be friends.”

Is that all we ever were? I had thought that we were more than friends though perhaps less than lovers. To hell with the word for it anyway! We were important. I’ve always known that.

Shapes are becoming clear. The painting must nearly be finished. I thought that this would be a labor of hours but whatever devil possesses my hands has gifted them with malevolent speed. It seems eager to be off, perhaps to possess the limb of some other craftsmen. The hand puts on the last few touches and falls limp to my side.

It’s a portrait of you, sitting in an old rocking chair before the storm that claimed your life. The rain hasn’t quite reached you yet. You’re dress is dry as the roast I tried to cook for you that night in New York.

You’re smiling in the picture but something isn’t quite right about the way you’re smiling. There is a vindictive curve in the lips that hadn’t been there before, a cruel sneer hidden in a veneer of beauty. The eyes are wrong too. No, this isn’t your face. It is a cruel imitation. I reach for a brush to fix the painting but my hands refuse to grasp it. Each time I try, I only come back with an empty palm.

Panic wells within me as I close my eyes and try to remember your face but see only the cruel woman stained on the canvas. The cabin becomes loud with the sound of rain. The horn of a large Chevy El Dorado blares as a pair of lights appear behind the imposters rocking chair. There’s no time. Three tons of steel skids toward me and your scream is the last thing I hear.

My vision is blurry at first but I see light. Not the warm yellow glow of my studio but the harsh white light of the hospital. The life I pretend doesn’t exist.

I look to the right of my bed and see a clear plastic bag labeled morphine, the real artist responsible for that god-awful creation.

“Nurse!” I cry. My voice is harsh and my throat is sore. Outside my open door, the sound of dainty footsteps on the hard ground signals the approach of a woman.

She’s young and has dark hair that looks Italian, even if she doesn’t. She might have stood a chance at my heart herself if I still had one.

“What is it?” she asks. She’s trying to sound pleasant but she obviously doesn’t like people shouting for her. I’m sure she would prefer that I use the pager connected to the bed.

Would that I could darling, would that I could.

“Can I have some water?”

She takes a glass from my bedside table and holds the button to lift me upright. I sip eagerly through the straw though it hurts my throat. I direct the handleless stump at the far end of my forearm toward the clear plastic bag.

“Can I have some more of that too?”

“Not for another hour.” She answers sternly “I’ll come back then.”

“Thank you.”

When she walks out the door, I am left alone with my thoughts. The last place I want to be. I look at the empty space where my hands used to be and the itching goes away, at least for a while. For the first time it really dawns on me that I’ll never paint again. I’ll never see you again.

Only in the cabin. Only in my dreams. Only in the house prescribed by Morpheus. When I see you again, I’ll tell you I’m sorry.
SUNNYSIDE UP // SHERLE CURTICE
STRAY HEART // ALEXA DAYN TEMPLETON
MORNING RAYS
KELLY MURRAY

WHITE FLOWER
JESSICA MARIE FOSSUM
There is an apple that wants eating—
No, more than just a mere desire—
It needs to be eaten by
young and old alike.
It contains knowledge and wisdom,
but far more than that—
within its supple, sweet flesh
there is something much greater,
more than just an idea…
there lies freedom.
Adam and his bride were punished
for eating from the tree of knowledge,
for they did not need to know,
enslaved and imprisoned by their
selfish creator, not wanting
them to know more than him and his creations.
Even so, Eve was tempted by a serpent
and could no longer resist the desire,
the thirst for KNOWING
and she bit the flesh, flooded with taste
of knowledge and hastened
to share with Adam so that he, too,
could be free.
So then why can we not question the powers that be?
Do we not crave the same wisdom that the original sinners did?
And no longer is that serpent
a manifestation of Satan;
Rather, there he is, slithering
through our minds, as our own
free will.

If that free will was given, gift-like,
from such a merciful creator,
then why should we not utilize that gift?
We may be constrained by the ideals of the higher-ups,
but we have the option to
break that mold, do we not?
We can use that gift (now a curse to the creator)
to unchain ourselves and soar,
our minds free to believe what they will—that
will, being free—and learn
all that they can consume.

Knowledge is endless, if only we are allowed access to it.
Yet don’t just take what you are given; you
cannot believe only what they feed you, else you
become malnourished and fall
amongst the withered masses.
I implore everyone—every living, breathing,
laughing, crying human being—to taste
the ‘Forbidden Fruit’ for yourself, and you
will realize before long that it was only
forbidden because they made it so.

Question everything;
then you will truly know freedom.
Nothing is absolute,
no one is infallible,
no being is omnipotent.
Feed your hunger for knowledge,
wisdom,
truth.
For what is that old adage?
The truth will set you free.
NUDE // DEBRA SMALL
It is highly disorienting to find oneself in a situation beyond one’s expertise. Take my situation, for example. I am currently sitting in a white, pristine cloud of a chair in the waiting lounge of one of the largest and most successful Fortune 500 companies in the world. The young man at the front desk glances over at me frequently, smiling in greeting occasionally. With every passing minute, I question my sanity of having stalked a man to satisfy my curiosity.

Needless to say, I am very uncomfortable. I’ve been staring myself in the brass of the revolving door for the past half hour, just listening to the sounds of traffic of the outside world. Harriet Smith does not do this type of thing. She does not drive over 1500 miles on a whim and demand to speak with a man who doesn’t even know of her existence. Harriet Smith is not the ballsy woman of the new generation. She’s the type of woman who is apologetic when the ladies at the nail salon exclaim at the dire state of her cuticles. After this expedition, I will most definitely have to examine the identity of Harriet Smith. Again.

Ironically, the only reason I’m in this situation is because of my first efforts to redefine my identity last winter. A family was found dead in my apartment complex around that time: the husband, the wife, and their three children. The article in the newspaper stated the wife shot them all and finally pulled the trigger on herself. Her name was Helena Steich and the entire apartment knew of her addiction to cocaine, alcohol, and a variety of other illicit drugs. We also knew her husband beat her and her children. None of us said anything about it. The worst part was the coroner found that Helena Steich was pregnant. I started to volunteer at the local center for battered women and children soon after the Steichs’ deaths. It was there where I met Meredith.

She came every Friday, promptly fifteen minutes before noon, to line up for the meal handouts at the center. Meredith stood out from the long line of women. She was one of the older regulars and had the look of one who’d lived too long; however, unlike the other women, she didn’t look dejected. Despite her humble clothing and lack of makeup, she was distinctly beautiful. There was an ineffable quality about her. Although I cannot say I immediately liked her, I did feel a connection to her. I must have stared for too long because after she received her lunch, she walked over and sat right by me. When she was finished with her food, she pulled out an enormous notebook from her oversized tote bag, the only accessory I ever saw her with. Meredith never spoke to me, but she communicated through writing in that thick notebook.

“You’re new. "Yes." You don’t look like a beaten woman. Why are you here?

I could’ve lied. I could have told her something ridiculous like my mother was once raped and I wanted to show my support for abused women. My brother was in denial of his girlfriend’s abuse towards him and I wanted to observe the operations of this center, so I could use the information to replicate a center for battered men. Anything, really. Somehow, I couldn’t bring myself to lie to Meredith.

“I knew a man who was abusive to his wife and children.” Did they come with you? “No, they’re dead.” You mourn them. “Not particularly. I barely knew them.” And yet you’re here.

She waited for me to speak, but there was nothing for me to say. I notice her eyes were different colors, like some of those cattle dogs. Her right eye was blue and her left eye was green. I remotely recalled my biology teacher saying this occurs when a gene for eye color is misrepresented. I note her patience seemed to never end.

“She was pregnant.” She must have been very happy. “She killed her entire family. She must not have been that happy.” Was she a good mother? “She killed her children.” I’ve come to learn mothers try to do the best for their little ones, but it’s not always easy. She loved them, even if it seemed like she didn’t. “I should have done something. They didn’t need to die like that.”

Meredith just patted my hand as I cried. I had not cried with such abandon since my first heartbreak. We continued our little chats every day. We talked about almost anything, but she loved to talk about her children.
“How many do you have?” Too many to count. “You don’t even know how many kids you have?” Those are not my words. There are too many of them for me to remember a single number, but I will never forget any of their names. “Alright then, well I’ll count for you. What are their names?” Deidre, Tanner, Alexi, Lauren, Taylor, Bartholomew, Christian, Ling Xia, Juan, Leonardo, Hitoshi, Lana, Georges, Charles, Penelope—“How is it biologically possible to have so many children?” I am their foster mother.

There was one child she loved to talk about; she said his name was H. Shepherd. She told me of his brilliance, ambition, and determination.

“You other children must have hated him.” Why do you think that? “He is quite clearly your favorite!” I do not have favorites—I love all my children equally. I only talk about him because he is the most interesting. I doubt you’d want to hear about what Luca does. “H. Shepherd must love you.” He is too spoiled and I allowed it to happen.

For the first time, she looked sad. I tried to ask her why, but she avoided the question. I never got my answer because she had not returned to the center since then. The mystery of her departure didn’t make sense to me. Meredith was generous with her trivia on her son and I knew he was a hot-shot CEO at a certain Fortune 500 company. I decided to meet this H. Shepherd.

“Harriet Smith, he’s ready to see you,” announced the man at the front desk. “He apologizes for the wait. Head on up to the 10th floor. There will be someone to escort you from there.”

Indeed, there was a woman waiting for me when I got to the 10th floor. I follow her into a large conference room and greet the man sitting at the head of the long oak table.

“Mr. Shepherd, it’s nice to finally meet you. I’ve heard great things from your mother.”

“I highly doubt that,” he laughs.

“I assure you, she is quite proud of your accomplishments.”

“I do apologize for the confusion, Ms. Smith. My name is Cleveland Carnegie. Mr. Shepherd has been dead for the past twenty years. Now, what can I do for you?”

“This can’t be,” I stutter, utterly confused. “Meredith never used the past tense. Oh no, she’s going to be devastated. You’ve got to tell her.”

“Meredith, as in Shepherd’s mother? She is fully aware of Shepherd’s death, I had the courtesy of telling her the news myself. It was a shame we had to give back the family heirloom, though. We certainly don’t need it now, as you can well see, but it would have fetched for a nice profit.”

“What do you mean?”

“The poor bastard was killed in a car accident after he stole the last item of value from his mother. I feel for the woman, I really do. He’s been sapping her dry for years, even ruined his siblings when he had the opportunity. All the funds went into building this company. I ought to thank him for handing me this empire. Give Meredith a kiss for me, won’t you? I won’t find another like Shepherd, but we’ve all got to move on with life.”

I try to digest the news as I leave the building. It’s hard to believe Cleveland Carnegie’s words and his representation of the person H. Shepherd was. After all, I barely know him. Surely, no woman could have spoken of her treacherous son with such pride. Suddenly, I realize what had drawn me to Meredith. Like me, she went to the center to mourn. In the eyes of others, she was exploited, disregarded, and betrayed by her son. She has every right to hate her son, but they don’t know Meredith like I do. She would have sacrificed herself to support him. There is a purity of her unconditional love for her children, which refuses to be tarnished even after she dies. I only hope her son knew this when he died.
SPRING //

ASHLEY BROWN

Disquieted by buds, bursting forth from branches that will later bring sustenance to our mothers’ wombs, while we float in the shameless androgyny that is life before life. We know no pain, bear no suffering, but we see what she sees. The vast, bubbling world of light is too much for our weary bodies, so we relax and fall back into our own circadian rhythm, heart beat keeping time and lulling us into a deep slumber. We are new, we are fresh. Our May birthdays are pleasant and breezy. We are warm-blooded souls made for warm days. The winter babes tell a different tale.
A REPEATING WORLD  //  JENNA ALLGEIER
MADE STRONG // ASHLEY BROWN

Mad at a rebellious body,
Useless at times
Loss of sensation in fingers and toes
Tysabri staves off relapse
Images of my brain fascinate and alarm doctors
People rush past, nearly knocking me down
Language becomes a struggle
Eyes are incapable of seeing this illness

—BUT—

Strength also came with my new existence
Caring family and friends rally
Leaps and bounds have been made
Every day is new and different
Research continues to make progress
Open arms have welcomed me into this new world
Scared, yes, but more than fear is determination
I’ve taken ownership of my life, choosing to

SEIZE THE DAY
DESCENT // PEGGY PETERSON

FULL MOON // PEGGY PETERSON
FORTUNE TELLER //
LINDA WILBOURN
There are people who pass through life, and leave no mark; make no impact. She was not one of these vacant passers. A San Francisco native, she possessed innumerable illuminating qualities, strength, compassion, and a sizzling sense of humor. Through the overcast of sickness and hidden pain and brief isolated windows of health, she guided me; she defended me; she educated me. My young gushy heart was engraved by her moral compass; from teaching me to respect my elders to showing me what it meant to love.

She made me view the world in new exciting ways. For many people, she was the woman with witty one-liners, making friends and strangers alike smile. To me she was simply my mom.

She embodied a higher standard of class for her time. She always had a copy of Mrs. Manners on standby laying gloriously by her ashtray and latest mystery novel. Many memories of her live on in my mind. Her sitting at the kitchen table cigarette in one hand, red pen in the other, and a glass of an oaky Chardonnay correcting my papers. We would sing Les Miserables together on long road trips, and would pop Popcorn when her favorite movie Dirty Dancing came on. She loved her Anne of Green Gables books, and would just give these hugs that you wish would continue on. My mother and I would look forward to our time together—just us. We would order food and chat away. We never let her sickness stop our mischievous fun; instead of going to the store and shopping, we would sit and watch QVC. And instead of going out for dinner, we’d order in! My mom and I had a relationship that many mother and daughters dreamt of.

Once her sickness began to consume her I noticed her eyes didn’t beam with the once contagious love that poured out; but instead was washed over barely leaving shimmer. My mother had unbelievable strength and she fought, no battled nonstop for nine years. My mother died on August 15, the Day Of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven. My mother embodied the values and morals of Mary. She has inspired me to try, for the rest of my life, to be a better, more compassionate person. My mother was the biggest influence in my life I am devastated that I can no longer just pick up the phone and call her. I know now she is no longer suffering in her body that was too small, too frail and too weak for her boisterous spirit.
LOOKING OUT // MICHAEL THOMAS
A Concise History of
The International
Typographic Style

By Christen Sharp

I became interested in the International Typographic Style after seeing the amazing work of Emil Kégl, Theo Ballmer, and Josef Müller-Brockmann. I love the simplicity and cleanliness of the Akzidenz-Grotesk, Univers, and Helvetica typefaces, as well as the use of the mathematical grid system. I find this style of design and type to be my all time favorite, not only to admire, but also to inspire my own designs. I went about the research of this project by browsing multiple poster designs to grasp a better understanding of what I would be working with and how to properly structure type and images. After studying Swiss design, I began to realize that everywhere you go, you will see something with Helvetica on it; on a street sign, a billboard, possibly displayed on the window of a subway. This is the impact it has made in our lives, and for that I have so much respect and appreciation for the International Typographic Style.

INTERNATIONAL TYPE STUDY // CHRISTEN SHARP
I.
Let me tell you a story,
of the greatest ship to ever sail
the sea of stars that hang overhead
Have you heard of the flight?
Did you witness the fall?
This plight of man
doomed
from the very first thought
that streaked across its creators mind.
A blind attempt to reach out
and touch
the bright-burning
life-giving
furnaces
that exist
at the dawn of human imagination.
Can you imagine the flight?
Can you fathom the fall?
The young captain at her helm,
feels their gravity pull at the
very things which hold a
soul together.
And draws her to them
across the vast nothingness.
A gnawing drive
to break free of mighty Sol and
to drift endlessly among
ancient giants.
How glorious a flight.
How tragic a fall.
The light of Sol spins and gathers
behind the massive wings.
And in a flash of energy and
motion the Icarus Ex
sets sail beyond the stars
that we have gazed upon forever.
Let me tell of the flight.
Let me tell of the fall.

I kiss him on the cheek;
A red stain reminder of our time
Together.
Glazed with sweat,
Our bodies collide;
Releasing an aurora into the bright lights.
As we dance
I see the exhaustion in his eyes
And know the night will be over soon.
He swings and I miss a step;
The breath leaves my body
And the lights begin to dim.
I hear voices.
I put my foot to the mat and
Reach
For him.
When I’ve met skin
I thrust
Once more, and he can take it no longer.
He bounces on the mat.
A cheer.
A bell.
I loved him that night.
FASHION SHOOT // DEBRA SMALL
CLEAN SLATE // KRISTYNN LEE
THE BITTER SWEET GOODBYE
AARON ANDERSON

Life
A silly journey through four dimensions,
The ridiculous choice of directions.
Tripping us up at every intersection.
I left a dream journal to mark my progress.
I footnoted the goals I achieved,
When I breathed a sigh of relief
And marched ever on to those still out of reach.
I like to look at the steps that I’ve taken.
The steps that I’ve climbed,
Not to regret while dragging my heels
But to remind me what I’ve done
That I’m leaving impressions that are real.
Passion for action is my newest attraction.
It is the verbs that I do not the words that I spew
Making me more than an object with a label
As valuable now as I was in the cradle.
Dispassionate inaction is too many’s reaction
To the call of the world
To feel fully fulfilled.
Alas, it is easy to be lazy when your dreams are still hazy.
It’s like heart gravity is pulling us down
But not moving is disproving that energy exists in our wings.
I know people who float and
I know people who fly.
When I asked one how she got to the sky
She simply replied
I’m not waiting to die.
So, goodbye slowing and goodbye skidding.
I’m skipping through life till my body stops twitching.

LIFE OF SPEED
AARON ANDERSON

It is said our brains race
Four hundred to six hundred
Words per minute
So that in one comfortable silence
People are in different conversations.
I want to learn to think at life speed
Mach no one with my thoughts
Zooming away.
To empathize with you,
To feel what you felt
In the moment you recall
Begs my question,
“Who are you?”
And is only answered
When I am still
Waiting
To understand
You
Waiting
To be understood.
We have two ears
And one mouth
It is said we should listen
In the same proportion
But a lot of things are Said.
It is Heard Mentality I desire
Not to group us into
One thing, but to
Destroy the desensitizing defense
Keeping us all apart.
Our souls cannot get physical
So lets meet without physicality at all
With elocution and verbage
To be verbose is looked down upon
Because we all got things to
Say
It isn’t so
We all got things to hear
To understand.
Bittersweet Reminiscences // Quentin Becker

Love will never truly leave you.
Love leaves a footprint;
It stays forever etched on you,
A tattoo that no amount of effort
Will ever fully remove.
You can walk on;
Turn the pages, open the next chapter,
And never return to that part of the book,
But it’s still there, written in permanent ink,
And any casual word can bring
The story back to mind.
See, love is powerful;
It can lead you to a mountaintop
And show you the stunning vista
Stretched before your awed gaze,
And in the same breath throw you from the peak
To the depths of the most endless abyss.
They say a single candle can hold back the darkness...
Love is more than a candle.
Love can ignite the stars.
“Why did you come to this burned out dusty nowhere?”
She asked me with earnest
confusion. I wanted to tell her for the bars or the sawdust on the floor
or even the great wide open plains. (We don’t have those where I
come from.) Maybe I’d tell her it was because of what I’d done
or failed to do, maybe just to leave. (Except) Looking at her
with one hand on her hip & one on the bottle all those
things fade away but not for something like love as
I’ve ever imagined it but more like a cataclysmic
jumbling of a million won’t fit moments of
her & I & neither of us all at once which
momentarily drives me into a delirious
frenzy searching for a period

I spill my drink.
Thoroughly dumbstruck
I stare at her. Politely wiping
up my mess she pours me another,
on the house, with the slow warm smile of
dusk in the fall.
BLACK AND WHITE IN CONCERT // VAL BALAGOT
THE TRAGEDY OF DR. JOSEPH MEDINA
CODY CAMPBELL

Doctor Joseph Medina was one of the most acclaimed psychiatrists in the greater San Francisco area. He specialized in relationships, which in San Francisco meant that most of his clients had interesting things to say. While it was true that the only reason most people came to therapy was to talk about the worst part of their lives, it was positively thrilling to hear nonetheless. Dr. Medina loved to hear people tell him their stories.

It never ceased to amaze him how two woman of similar age and intelligence could be equally upset over two incredibly different sets of problems. While one woman maybe upset that her husband cheated on her, stole money from her purse and kicked her dog, another could seem equally upset about her husband watching too much television and forgetting their anniversary.

Of course he was more than capable of analyzing this. That is, of course, what he is paid to do, but understanding the cause of such behaviors made them no less interesting.

Ever since he was incredibly young, Joe loved to listen to people talk about themselves. This was convenient since people seemed to love talking to him. Joe was a tremendous listener. He was attentive, but not unnervingly so, he never interrupted and he never judged. He could make a man feel at ease telling him about his darkest secrets, as easily as if they were talking about what he had for breakfast that morning. It really was quite miraculous.

Now after decades of honing this gift, along with a few years of psychiatric training, he had wonderfully comfortable office on the top floor of one of the tallest buildings, in one of the most famous cities on earth. He even had his own billboard near the bridge! Yes indeed, Joe had been doing quite well for himself. That is of course, what makes his tale all the more humbling.

It was a sunny but cold morning in San Francisco when Dr. Medina entered his office at the beginning of the day. He walked quickly over to his chair, took off his shoes, set down his brief case, cranked up the thermostat and then crouched over the vent. Immediately warm air began to funnel into the room. It shot up his pant legs and filled his clothes up like a balloon.

For several minutes he sat like this, enjoying the wonderful, dry heat and trying his best not to think about what he would have to do that day. Then as often happens when you’re enjoying something, it ended far too quickly. The clock rolled around to nine and his first clients arrived.

Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs. They were a nice enough couple, no real problems to speak of. They sought therapy because they felt like they had grown apart in the past year. They had already worked out most of their difficulties. This visit was mostly just an oil change, to keep things running smoothly.

Mr. Jacobs had been paying closer attention when Mrs. Jacobs is upset and Mrs. Jacobs had been paying more attention to Mr. Jacobs’ needs in the bedroom. Cases like this were nice to thin out the herd of complex cases that Joe usually had to deal with. Still, the Jacobs’ may not have been his most desperate or needy clients but Dr. Medina wished he had given them a better performance all the same. Today he was very distracted. He knew that his work suffered for it. It was a relief when their hour ended and Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs left.

His next client was the recently divorced, Ms. Joan Kelly. She was a beautiful young woman that had caused Joe to wrestle with his oaths as a therapist for the first time since he took them. He was fascinated by each and every one of his patients. He loved to listen but he never became emotionally attached. This is exactly what made him so good at his job, but for some reason the same rules didn’t apply with Joan. Despite his best efforts, he was quite taken with her. He had done his best to swallow these emotions and remain professional but at their last meeting, it was only the timely intervention of his ‘end of session’ alarm that had saved him from professing his love then and there.
So on the following night over many drinks, he finally made the decision that he needed to transfer her to a different therapist. This was to be their last session. Today would be a hard day indeed. Joe nearly jumped out of his skin when his secretary told him Joan had arrived.

She walked into the room smelling of wild flowers. She was wearing a sundress despite the cold. Small goose bumps dotted her exposed legs. Joe took her bag for her and showed her to the couch. She was one of the few people who actually liked using the couch to lay back and relax during therapy. Once she had made herself comfortable, Joe made his way to his chair behind her. Despite himself he popped a mint from his desk drawer into his mouth before sitting down.

“So, what do you want to talk about today?” Joe asked as calmly as he could manage. He felt as jittery a school child.

“Well, things have been pretty good for me actually.” Joan began, her voice sounding nearly as soft as her skin looked “I think I’m finally over Mark. There’s someone else actually.”

Joe gulped in surprise and started to choke on the mint. “Is that so?” he sputtered, “Go on.”

He tried to listen quietly and attentively as she described this mystery man, of whom she had never spoken before. He couldn’t seem to focus however as the mint was still lodged in the throat. He just couldn’t get it to come out quietly. He didn’t want to make a fuss and distract Joan from what she was about to say. Finally when his face began to turn blue, the room began to spin and he could hold on no longer, Joe gave a mighty cough but the mint still would not dislodge itself from his throat. Now in real trouble, he waved his arms feebly and tried to cry out but it was no use. Joan was still lying on the couch and could neither see nor hear him. Dr. Medina’s body gave a few weak spasms before he finally relaxed back into his chair and died.

“I know!” Joan continued enthusiastically “I know you’re not supposed to and I know it’s not normal, but I think I’m falling for you Joe. I’ll change therapists, I’ll sign papers, and I’ll do whatever I need to do in order to be with you just please say yes…or if you can’t say yes, don’t say anything, just please don’t say no.”

Dr. Medina remained silent.

“Oh good!” Joan shouted springing from the couch and leaping across the room into Dr. Medina’s outstretched arms. She looked deeply into the earthy brown of his eyes that were spread wide with shock, saw how his face seemed to be stiff with surprise, then leaned in close and gave the longest and most intimate kiss to his gently parted lips.

“Yum,” she said as she leaned further into his embrace “I love wintergreen.”
Flowers trim a fresh picked basket
Black satin laces a closed lid casket
Bored by the quiet, a yawn from inside
Unaware of the shadow, that someone has died
He stretches his arms as if to wake
And prays he is dreaming for his Mother’s sake
Uncertainty shakes him, instinctive fear is walking
To a child whose death an angel is rocking
Something familiar dances on the angels wings
Alcohol mocks his moves on marionette strings
He shudders at the puppet cloaked in black
Looking into his eyes, that couldn’t look back
And then he remembered being under the tires
Bleeding into the metal and telephone wires
No! Yes! His reality lives, too bitter, too grim
And a few drinks couldn’t have done this to him...
Each year alcohol buries under shovels of dirt
The innocence of hell from a world of hurt
It’s too late to go home when tires scream
Stopping in blood, beyond the dream
UNTITLED // AVITALA RUBANENKO
Picture,
a wash of blue smeared
across a canvas called our sky.
A calm dream dances through its depths
and sighs of deafening beauty,
of warm days and laughs
snapped
into memories.
Imagine,
a breath of air that
freezes thought and buries a
concrete mind under fresh pine
and crisp snow, beneath a breath
that promises a
new
beginning.
Think,
of the prettiest
eyes you have ever known and
let them tell you their story.
Of how a deep green became
a moonlit meadow
or
a gold flaked
blue
a wave
catching sunrise.
Realize,
that a lock of a
car is an angel's call. That
here is love and family
and a single click can lift
yesterday from the
heart.
Frame,
the smile of eyes
sweeping over society's
disordered room and knowing
that every unfolded
shirt and unstacked book
is
in perfect
place.
Believe,
in the innocence
and future that small hands hold,
in the trust and absolute
love vast wells of blue shine of.
That small delicate
lips
will never
speak
of pain.
Dream,
of these reflections
and know
I write of
Peace.
BIRDS // NICOLE EDWARDS
NEUSCHWANSTEIN CASTLE // DEBRA SMALL
A crow screeched and flew down in front of Mari as she walked down the road, startling her. Her breath hitching, looking visibly shaken as she watched the crow land on the branch of an old elm tree that stood like a silent sentinel along the side of the road. It was fully night now, the moon just cresting the horizon like a fat lamp that shone upon the earth. Mari continued walking down the road toward the bridge. She walked this same path every night for as long as she could remember. She wore a white dress, the material light and flowing in the light breeze that went through the trees and down the road, swirling around her as she soldiered on toward the bridge.

The sound of the river floated up toward Mari, soft and rhythmic, as the river curved around the bends and turns through the canyon. Mari was content with the solitude, knowing she had someplace to be, someplace important, but she couldn’t remember. The bridge, that was the key to everything. The cries from the crow echoed down to Mari, taunting her. Settling like an eerie vale upon the canyon. Mari followed the road as it slanted downward, taking her closer and closer to the bridge. The moon higher in the sky now, shining light down upon her path as her dress caressed her body, lapping lightly in the breeze as she turned the corner and brought the bridge into view.

No. Something was wrong about this place. She shouldn’t be here. And yet, she felt compelled that she make it to the bridge. An overwhelming need that drew her every time she walked here. The bridge was ancient, wooden slats filled in the floor of the bridge. Some were more rotten than others, making it dangerous if you didn’t know the way. How cars were still able to drive upon it, she didn’t know. Just that she knew the bridge better than anyone else. Like the lines in ones face or hands, knowing they were there but wishing it wasn’t so.

The sound of a car fluttered down to Mari as she walked closer to the bridge, transfixed. The trees fell away as she walked closer and closer. The metallic smell of something old and rusted wafted up from under the bridge. The water that flowed freely down the canyon made a rushing noise as Mari stood right in front of the bridge now, as close as she could get without physically being on the old wooden structure.

The car was closer now. Mari looked up and saw the soft glow of the headlights winding its way down the road toward her. She had to make a decision. Walk onto the bridge or walk away. The decision tearing her in two, she made the decision she made every single night. One that she felt compelled to make.

Mari’s footsteps on the bridge made no sound. It puzzled her. Surely her weight would cause some disturbance in the decrepit bridge. And yet, it was like she wasn’t even there at all. Mari walked further onto the bridge, the breeze a little stronger, billowing her dress and hair as she walked out further over the water. The rushing of the water louder, coming from underneath. Mari stopped in the middle of the bridge. The sides of the wooden railing were gone. Someone must have driven off the side and they hadn’t replaced the railing yet. Mari rubbed her chest, feeling it tighten and her breath come quicker. What was it about this bridge that caused such foreboding down to the marrow of her bones?

Mari looked up and saw that the moon was now at its highest point. The sound of the car was upon her now. It was imperative that Mari warn them away. The car would never make it over the bridge, it was too old, and it would never hold the weight. Mari rushed toward the end of the bridge and stood there. Knowing that she would be seen and someone would stop. The car’s headlights illuminated Mari, her white dress shining like a beacon in the dark.

The car sped pass Mari, watching as the woman driving looked back at her with shocked eyes. She almost couldn’t tell if there was someone in the car at all. It was so dark, and the woman in the car was wearing dark clothes on top of it all. The only clue that she was sure someone was driving at all, was the woman’s ice blue eyes staring back at her. Fear laced through them. Mari cried out after the driver to stop, but alas, the car kept going out onto the bridge. The floor suddenly gave way and the car fell through into the dark abyss below. Mari rushed out to where the car disappeared, praying to find the woman. Mari heard metal crunch against metal as water splashed up.

She searched the water, looking for any indication that the woman made it out alive. The water rushing around the end of the car that was left jutting out of the river, the cab completely submerged in the icy depths. No movement. None. Then, out of the corner or her eye, something moving on the bank. Mari rushed over to the side of the bridge as she held onto the side, looking out as she watched the woman emerge from the river.

Except something was wrong. So terribly wrong. Mari left the bridge and hastened to the river bank, needing to get to the woman, needing to disprove what her eyes were telling her to be true. Mari stopped in front of the woman and knew she couldn’t ignore the truth any longer. The woman stood on the river bank, unscathed. Even though she emerged from the river, not one single droplet of water clung to her. But what couldn’t be denied was the fact that she was no longer in her clothes. But rather in a pure white dress, like Mari.

“What, happened, where am I?” The woman sounded confused as she looked around, her eyes landing on Mari as she waited for an answer. Her face scrunched up in thought. “Have we met before? You look familiar.”

“I’m here to guide you.” Mari walked up to the woman and wrapped an arm around her shoulder, sorrow flashing across her face as they walked up from the river bank, back toward the road.

“What are we going?”

“We have a job to do.” Mari looked solemn as both of them began to walk back up the road, the moon now hanging low on the horizon. The trees began to envelop them and the crow cried out once more. Mari was quiet, holding the woman and walking further and further away from the bridge. Silently vowing that no one else would share their fate.
The room was suffocating me. I felt the chewy cafeteria nuggets churning in my stomach like a wannabe hurricane. Everywhere I turned, everyone, fucking everyone, all of the happy go lucky morons, pretended to care. And that emo bitch with all of those piercing was wearing that depressing, dark-fucking, black again. The one that is so dark you start to see purple if you stare at it too long—black hole—fucking black. Hell, Mr. White was even wearing it. And that chemical smell, the one that burns at your eyes and eats away at your soul, formaldehyde I think, was stuck to the roof of my mouth. I didn’t believe chugging fifteen bottles of Listerine could kill it. My heart flared up in a panic. Breathe in. Breathe out.

Elianna shuffled past me and I caught some ramble of words about a school project that would never get done. I told her to fucking shut up, but the words I spat out were alien. It sounded as if the life had been lipoed out of my voice. I felt the cafeteria’s mystery meat rise in my stomach like an acidic volcano. My vision became drunk and the world a distorted glass. Breathe in. Breathe out. Mr. White started to make an honorary speech about Eric and my eyes turned to fire. Breathe in. Breathe out. Who were they to talk about him? To say his name? To honor him in death? The whole room, the whole fucking thing felt like black and white Hollywood shit. I couldn’t take it anymore. I choked on my emotions and stumbled out of class.

The hallway was plastered with student-body-made-posters that told of sorrow, loss, and community spirit. They were like snowflakes on Halloween; biggest fucking joke of my life. I started towards the nearest one and took a ragged strip out of We’ll miss you Eric! to which I compacted and kicked at some passing shit-head. I ran my hand along, Honoring Eric Schmidt: Memorial Assembly @ 3 p.m., tearing it as I walked past decaying lockers and open classroom doors. People stared like I was some fucking teenage celebrity who had been arrested for drunk driving. I kept walking, ripping at the false words and fake sorrow. I stopped trying to breathe in life and breathe out pain. I followed my emotions like they were a natural law.

I slammed open the cafeteria doors as the warmth of a stupid tear blinked in my eye. I marched through the vacant tables that stood upright like fucking gravestones to the far side of the room. Some half-brained dick had pinned a long ass piece of paper on the white-washed walls so students could write their thoughts and feelings about Eric. His death had been turned into the high school’s fucking community diary. The notes ranged from the vague Always in our Hearts! to I only talked to him once, but I will remember that conversation forever. There was even some wise ass crack of A tragedy of youth, innocence, and loss; a tragedy that will live on in our minds forever. Some passages quoted him like he had been some fucking scholar, others pretended to have a favorite memory of him. It was all shit and I felt like damming them all to Hell.

I viciously tore the poster down and began the satisfying process of tearing it into the smallest fucking pieces I could, reading the comments as I went. He will always be my friend. – Susan Tyler. Oh really Susan Tyler? I don’t even know who you are but I’m pretty sure I’ve been Eric’s best fucking friend since kindergarten. I shredded that stupid cliché into confetti. I can’t believe he died so young. It really puts things in perspective. – Isaac Sanders. No shit you fucking genius. I crumpled that fool until he and his stupid thoughts were the size of a pebble.

The bell rang like a goddamn death sentence. I tore the last comment into uneven strips and laid myself down in the middle of the artificial sentiments. I closed my eyes and drifted away from the phony words, the cold cafeteria floor, away from the fucking high school and petty concerns.

It was 1999 and a glowing summer’s day with marshmallow clouds floating across the sky as five year old Eric walked up to me. His light eyes danced with joy when I told him that yes, I would pass the basketball back and forth with him. Around me I felt a trembling vibration of feet. Eight year old Eric looked sideways at me as we ran, laughing in triumph, as we successfully doorbell ditched my cranky neighbor’s house. A clamor of voices invaded my peaceful realm like an alarm during a dream.

Three years later rain drizzled across the spring day but Eric and I still peddled our bikes through the muddy paths in the nearby park and played catch all afternoon. Later he cried himself to sleep at my house over his parent’s divorce. Someone in another land yelled my name and prodded me for attention. Fourteen year old Eric and I walked through towering halls and imposing faces, wanting to flee to the safety of middle school, but too cool to admit that sort of idea out loud. Someone was shaking me, yelling my name; I felt a hundred eyes staring into my soul. Seventeen year old Eric and I were on a double date in Dan’s ice cream shop, and the awkward tension screamed in the small booth. Afterwards, he went home with my date. A gentle voice whispered in my ear, calling me back to the world of pain and sorrow.

Eric nudged my side and pointed to the stars on our way home from the homecoming football game. He started explaining to me the story of the constellation Cygnus the Swan from his mythology class. I didn’t listen to him, only gave him a sickening punch to the jaw for what happened on the date and walked away.

I saw myself sitting on a plastic chair a day later, answering questions for the police in a dead, hollow voice. They told me that it had been a meth addict who bounced between rehab and jail like a ricocheting bullet. The fucking meth head had needed a fix and Eric was all alone with a shiny silver watch from his grandfather that gleamed in the darkness. One shot to the stomach and Eric died alone with Cygnus lingering over him.

I curled inward on myself, hugging my bruised knuckles, and cried into the condolences that I had shredded and smashed. Eric’s eyes shone across my vision with a vacant sorrow and I watched the anger gleam across my face as I walked away from my best friend.
LUMEN PRINT // SHERLE CURTIS
Ingredients
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cocoa powder
1 1/2 cups vegetable oil
1 cup buttermilk, room temperature
2 large eggs, room temperature
2 tablespoons red food coloring
1 teaspoon white distilled vinegar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the Chocolate Cream Cheese Frosting:
1 package of Philadelphia milk chocolate cream cheese, softened
2 sticks butter, softened
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 cups sifted confectioners’ sugar

Directions
Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line 2 (12-cup) muffin pans with cupcake papers.

In a medium mixing bowl, sift together the flour, sugar, baking soda, salt, and cocoa powder. In a large bowl gently beat together the oil, buttermilk, eggs, food coloring, vinegar, and vanilla with a handheld electric mixer. Add the sifted dry ingredients to the wet and mix until smooth and thoroughly combined.

Divide the batter evenly among the cupcake tins about 2/3 filled. Bake in oven for about 20 to 22 minutes, turning the pans once, half way through. Test the cupcakes with a toothpick for doneness. Remove from oven and cool completely before frosting.

For the Cream Cheese Frosting:

In a large mixing bowl, beat the cream cheese, butter and vanilla together until smooth. Add the sugar and on low speed, beat until incorporated. Increase the speed to high and mix until very light and fluffy.
THIS IS ABOUT US,
FOR JANE
WENDAH ALVAREZ

Fragmented memories,
like dust-- life. I miss your face.
I miss my life.
We wanted space-- time.

Now, I think of you even in my sleep.
I wonder if you’re breathing
easy air
waiting for my words.

We used to laugh at the
little people with funny words.
We used to touch with
firm hands

And forced ourselves not to sleep
because time is like smoke
we can’t keep
we can’t hold on to.

So we stretched time
listening
to Norah Jones and
the Songs About Jane

drinking pale red wine
trading sides of the bed
looking into each other’s eyes
comparing hands,

exchanging skins
lowering inhibitions,
crawling into each others heads
and coming out

of each others mouth.
Sneaking innuendos
though we didn’t need them
desire was always there

exposed like pale skin
wanting to soak the sun
naked

I wonder what you think of me now?
If I reached my shelf life,
lost my patience, or just simply
got tired?

I’ve always wanted to write about us.
How your body radiated
heat when I’m around.

How I let you comb my hair.
How I let you touch
me
and take my heart.

How I let you hurt
me
with your tattooed arm and
with your other lovers.

How I surmised and compared
myself with them.
How I wanted to be better.
How I wanted you to choose me.

How in the end I chose to
end us
then wrote rims and string lines of
broken-hearted songs,

the same Songs About Jane
and the Daffodils Lament
and Mary Jane

and how one of them was
actually Jane.
I wanted to write about us.
CLOCK RAVEN // HEATHER CURTIS

ANNULAR ECLIPSE // ASTRONOMY CLUB
At this point, it's where we are.

We light a drag and down a drink
then share a space in gray
bucket seats just to go at it again, and again.
Listening to the extreme sounds of
whispered secrets
and screaming indignations
trembling to the hilarity of awkward fit,
like asses on stick shifts
twisted arms on chairs
and consoles on ribs.

"Was it good for you?"

Perhaps, this is the last song.
We pick-up the pace of coordinated love
though I'm always half a step
behind your long strides.
You, always pushing forward
the rhythm of lines
And I pull back for the end rhymes.

But we never talk about it.

Instead, we glow
in the satisfying exhilaration of Cope’s
wanting ads
and Shakespeare’s sonnet about
his mother locked in the attic
and smile with disdain about our past
lovers bent “tricks.”

Because we break boundaries.

With caffeine and heady perfume hang in
the air as tingling nose attempts
to balance carbon exchange
gasping for air
matching tempo
arriving at the
same height,
peak at the
crescendo of
lush.

Let’s turn up this music
for another dance.
CLOCKMAKER //
HEATHER CURTIS
STAIRWAY TO THE SUN //
KATHRYN STEWARD
Nobody has ever asked me what I would do the day before the end of the world. I suppose most people would say they’d do something outlandish. Perhaps they would skydive, get a tattoo, or shovel food into their mouths until it burst through their stomach lining. If someone were to ask me what I’d do, I’d say sit in a dingy basement next to a box of canned beans. This wouldn’t be by choice, of course. But then again, I don’t think the majority of people were expecting the apocalypse anytime soon.

Ever since my father took an interest in computers, he’s insisted a conspiracy would soon take place to separate the weak from the strong.

"Eliza?" my father calls from the basement. I lean over the banister, balancing a stack of sleeping bags above my head. "Yeah?"

"I don’t think we have enough batteries for all of these flashlights. Can you find anymore upstairs?"

"That’s all we have…I can go to the store if you need some." Why bother asking when I already know the answer?

"Absolutely not. No one is leaving this house. Do you know how chaotic the streets will be? These will have to do."

I nod and climb another set of stairs to my brother’s room at the end of the hall. I don’t bother knocking, and find him lying on his stomach in his Power Rangers pajamas on the floor in front of a puzzle. With a wrinkled brow and his tongue poking out of the corner of his mouth, he jams a piece into an open space. He does not bother looking up when I scold him for hiding out while the rest of us prepare for...whatever there is to prepare for. As I wait for a response, I scan the room, taking in the countless number of completed puzzles scattered across the floor and bed.

My brother smiles, revealing a space where a tooth once resided. “I like putting these back together. The way they should be.”

Between my father’s yelling and my aunt’s incessant need to fix her wig, I am able to find my uncle on the couch between the cushions. "Oh, darling!" my aunt cries, reaching for him.

I can’t help but notice how much lighter he feels in my hands.

Aunt Carol kisses the cool, black urn before clapping it against her chest. "I’m so sorry, Donald. Never again. Never."

“You two should get settled downstairs. It’s going to get dark soon.”

She pinches my arm before leaving the room, cradling Uncle Donald like a newborn. At that moment I wonder if my reaction will be the same when we’re reunited with my mother. I feel a twinge of pain in my stomach as I picture her walking through the door. "It’s only been a week," I mutter under my breath.

By 8 o’clock I’m lining up the sleeping bags on the basement floor. Now that I won’t be able to watch the fireworks at the mall from my bedroom window, I find no reason to stay awake until midnight.

"Eliza, why are there only four sleeping bags?" my father asks, shining the flashlight in my face.

"Do you really think Uncle Donald needs his own?"

My father scowls at me. “Get another one in case your mother…” His voice trails off.

Another knot twists in my stomach. “Do you really think she’ll show?”

“I do. I’m sure her vacation is over by now.”

I scoff at how convenient it was that she didn’t bother sharing where this “vacation” was taking place.
Nobody speaks, but their thoughts are loud and clear. How long will we be down here? What exactly are we waiting for? Will another body fill that last sleeping bag?

My father tilts his head to get a better view of the door at the top of the steps, as if expecting a herd of terrified neighbors to plow through it.

I sit against the cement wall and close my eyes, listening to my father’s heavy breathing, to my brother grunt every time he picks up the wrong puzzle piece, and to my aunt whisper to her dead husband under the covers of her sleeping bag.

“I should have bought more supplies yesterday.”

I open my eyes and glance over at my father. “We have plenty.”

“Maybe I should go upstairs and bring some more of our things down here. More valuables.”

“Nobody’s going to steal anything, Dad.”

“I just want everything safe and in one place. That’s the way it should be. We can’t leave all of it out in the open. What will your mother think when she sees we’ve abandoned everything upstairs?”

“I can’t see why she’d care.”

My brother slams his hand against the floor. “There’s a piece missing. I can’t finish it. How can I put it back together when a piece is missing?”

“We’ll find it, Aaron. Don’t worry.” My father points the flashlight at my brother’s sleeping bag. I am surprised when no one yells at Aaron when he begins to whimper. Normally my father would find this pathetic, but everyone seems to be determined to find the last piece to the puzzle.

With only an hour until the New Year begins, the room becomes still, the only sound a faint hum from the dying light bulb above our heads. Every once in a while I hear my father comforting my brother that there’s still time. That she can still make it. Aunt Carol is silent now, and for a moment I think she’s fallen asleep. It isn’t until I hear a chewing sound come from under her blanket that I realize she is very much awake.

Next to her pillow is the lid to Donald’s urn. I squint, praying that what I’m seeing is only a figment of my imagination. I must be very bored to come up with something like this. That’s it, there’s nothing to do in this basement, so I’ve imagined my aunt eating my uncle.

Still, I lean over and lift the blanket from Aunt Carol’s head. She gasps and covers her mouth, but it is too late. I’ve seen the open urn pressed against her and a few crumbs from her meal sticking to her shirt.

I jump back, turning my body away from her. I ignore her explanation, her anxious tone, her quiet pleas to not tell my father. It’s a way to keep them together, she explains. She doesn’t enjoy the deed, only the feeling of being whole, she says. She couldn’t stand being apart from him. It was the same feeling we had for my mother, she argues. The desperation is now clear in her voice.

I give her a cold, hard look until she is quiet. I sit on my hands to keep them from slapping her for comparing herself to me. She’s just an insane, old woman holding on to something that no longer exists. As this thought enters my mind, my calm composure disappears. My heart begins to race, pounding against my chest, aching to break free. I grab the closest object to me and throw it across the room. I flail my arms until they come into contact with the stacked cans of beans. My father screams at me, but I cannot stop. I rip my brother’s puzzle apart and smash my flashlight on the concrete floor.

The room is spinning now, and my heart prepares to leap out of my chest. I am hyperventilating, but I don’t care. I can see clearly for the first time. I encourage the rate of my pulse to increase as I jump on the cases of water until I feel them soak my shoes and socks.

A hysterical laugh comes out of me. “Together!” I exclaim. What a ridiculous word.

And as a lump rises in my throat and moisture stings my eyes, I realize my mother is never coming home.
SIGHT // ARIELLE BALDWIN

TIGER EYES // DANIELLE THROCKMORTON
The empire has fallen. The one shimmering light of civilization in an otherwise dark and chaotic world has now been extinguished. We all knew it was coming. It had been a slow death and yet such knowledge doesn't make the end any less bitter. We have been at war for time beyond memory. Perhaps it is a mercy that mother Rome need suffer no longer.

For the first time in history, the capitol is taken. The battle was hard fought but we were too few, spread too thin. Our commanders had been greedy, sending our armies away to conquer while our homes were left undefended. Just as two soldiers can't be expected to man an entire battlement, a thousand cannot defend Rome.

Eventually the brutes managed to force their way in. They marched within the sacred walls of my city and took our emperor as if he were nothing more than a dog to be roasted from their house. When the officers who had commanded us were executed, I tried to rally a resistance. I gathered what soldiers I could and trained militia of citizens and slaves to fill in the gaps. It was my goal to liberate our emperor and escort him to the lowlands where he still had armies that might reclaim our home.

Our skirmishes were short and doomed to failure however. Those who had been proud to call themselves Roman the day before were surprisingly quick to love their new masters. It was these traitors that were our ruin. We were scattered, each of us was left to try and escape on our own.

When I was a boy, I won several sword competitions. I defeated men twice my size. Such was my skill that I impressed the local captain. He let an urchin with no status join the imperial legion two years early.

I have dedicated my entire life to the preservation, study and improvement of the Roman Empire. Now it's gone, ground under the boots of barbarians.

Would that the tragedy ended there. I rushed home to gather my wife and daughters from that husk of a city. I intended to gather them from her rotting bosom and give flight to less savage country. Perhaps we could have built a life from the bounty of soil and game offered by the forest but again, I was denied.

I arrived to find my house empty of life save one man, picking through my wife's possessions like a vulture. My children were taken. My wife's body was on the floor. She had driven a knife into her own chest rather than suffer the indignities those monsters would have forced on her.

I don't pretend to understand how the minds of these barbarians work, nor do I wish to. Such rampant hate can't stem from simple ignorance. It must have its source in some deeper malevolence, some darker purpose. How had my simple life merited such wrath from the gods? What offence had I committed to deserve such punishment? They have left me with nothing.

I considered the fate of the remaining barbarian. Torture crossed my mind. The thought of bones breaking and this miserable beasts scream invited a savage pleasure. I could keep him alive for weeks if I wanted. Instead I killed him quickly and took his horse. I had no desire to stay in that house a moment longer.

Taking the messengers pass at a rapid pace I managed to kill two more before I exited the city. Would that it were a dozen, that it were all of them. My only fortune, if it can be called such, was that the road had been poorly guarded. Too many men were busy picking at the bones of Romulus.

For two days and nights I rode. I gave the horse no mercy, pressing it to its limits. I cut through the forest to the south, right past their patrols and continued on to, I know not where. I was riding without thought of destination, only escape.

Perhaps it was cowardice that I wanted to survive. Maybe I should have stayed and killed as many as possible before I fell. Then I could face Pluto with pride, as a Roman centurion should.

I wrestled at the reigns. Twice I turned back only to circle again in flight. More than fear it was shame that drove me away. I failed in my charges as a soldier, husband and father.

Finally on the third day I gave in to the creature's pants and whines. I stopped in a mountain pass where a small stream trickled through. Here the horse could drink and graze to it's leisure.

I sat lazily on the grass. It had a comfortable, spongy texture and had absorbed much of the suns
I lied back and cried, as I had not since childhood, shielding my face from Apollo’s sight.

Without realizing it, I had fallen asleep. I would have thought only a moment passed but the sun had begun it’s decent behind the mountain. My mount was nowhere to be seen.

“Horse!” I cried, but if the beast was near, it gave no response.

I drank my fill from the stream and began to follow his trail as best I could. I have little skill as a tracker but fortunately the heavy beast has left deep footprints in the soft ground. It seemed that he grazed the area for sometime before venturing onto a nearby trail.

It was rough and steep. As I climbed, the trail grew ever more rocky and thus increasingly difficult to follow. It’s very unusual for a horse to choose such a rough and awkward climb when unbidden. This trail held no promise of water or food, both of which were in the valley below. So why did it come this way?

With little food and even less coin, a strong horse was too valuable a creature to give up. After just over an hour of searching, I finally found him with his reigns snagged on a thorny bit of brush. It cried and tugged at the reigns, only serving to cut it’s own maw and ensnare itself further.

“Serves you right.” I said as I pulled my knife from its sheath.

It took me nearly all of the days remaining light to calm the creature enough that I might cut it free. Even upon its release, it seemed wild.

“What is it?”

The horse continued to pull in the direction it had been heading before it had gotten itself snagged. It pulled and whined. The pale creature’s eyes nearly bulged out of its skull.

Every bit of sense I had told me to keep his head down and lead him back to the bottom of the mountain. Curiosity defeated me. I straddled the horse and slowly allowed it to take me onward.

It took a great deal of effort to keep us at a safe pace. With no direction or incentive from me, the horse led us further and further up the mountain. Occasionally we crossed ledges or brambles that appeared to go absolutely nowhere only to find ourselves emerging suddenly upon another trail.

It was clear that the animal knew where it was going. Either it had been here before or it was being led by some form of beast sense we humans don’t share. My riding instructor told me of such things when I first learned.

He told me that if I was ever lost, my horse would lead me back to safety. If ever I had thirst, my horse would lead me to drink and if ever there was danger, my horse would know about it long before I.

We were crossing a particularly steep ledge when I began to hear it too. There was a voice in the air, a woman’s voice. It was singing a song unlike anything I had ever heard before. Feint as it was, I began to understand my mounts desire to charge head first into the coming night.

We continued onward with the voice as our beacon. Now that we were so close, I gave less consideration to hampering my steed’s movements and started urging it on. We leaped thickets of thorn, climbed loose stones and nearly fell to our deaths more than once but we survived. Just as the last rays of light were disappearing into the velvet sky, we arrived at the source. A cave appeared like a mouth in the Earth, ready to swallow me whole.

I dismounted from my steed. There was no way he would be able to fit between the mountains narrow lips.

“Thank you for bringing me here.” I said, “You’ve done very well Spurius. May you lead a long and healthy life.”

I slapped his flanks and watched my last friend ride off into the distance. I didn’t know what I would find ahead but I knew that I wouldn’t have need for a horse.

The song was alluring beyond measure. So strong that I could feel it resonating throughout my entire body, vibrating in my fingertips. Surely it was Venus that resided in this low hall of stone.

I took a moment to find a strong young branch from which I could make a torch with oil and flint. Once it was ablaze, I had no more hesitation. My heart released the fear it had clenched since I fist saw the cold hands of my daughters.

The inside of the cave was warm with the song though it appeared damp and the air tasted of mold and earth. The footing was uneven but I made my way through it. The flame from my torch gave me only enough light for a dozen paces.

I was so enthralled that I never stopped to wonder what manner of maiden might be found in such a dreary place, nor what caused her voice to carry so far. The song was in no language I knew and yet I understood it perfectly. It promised to erase my past, all memory of what I’ve lost. Such beautiful gifts, the gods’s themselves couldn’t grant better.

The cave was deep. My torch was burnt half way to the nub by the time I reached the end. More and more it became clear that this was a venture from which I wouldn’t return.

My faith was unshaken. I would find this woman and demand what she promised me. I would demand oblivion.

Finally I came to the source of the sound. The tunnel opened up to a great cavern adorned with crystalline walls that glimmered and amplified my torches light to the entire room. It was massive, large enough to rival the coliseum itself. At it’s center was a lake. It was deep, clear and still as death. I approached the water’s edge and reached out to touch the glassy surface. Cool water danced across my naked fingertips, icy and clean. The ripples from my touch crossed the entire cavern. The lake trembled.

Tantalized by my touch, the song warmed me to the bone. It bade me to drink, so I did. I cupped the water in my hands. Crisp, clean life tingled in my palms. Not a single drop was spilled between the lake and my lips. Never before have I tasted water so sweet. It gave my limbs life and washed away the burdens of my sins and failures. The singing stopped.

Without it, the air grew cold.
WHY DID YOU COME TO THIS BURNED OUT DUSTY NOWHERE?

KYLE TAYLOR

She asked me with earnest confusion. I wanted to tell her for the bars or the sawdust on the floor or even the great wide open plains. (We don’t have those where I come from.) Maybe I’d tell her it was because of what I’d done or failed to do, maybe just to leave. (Except) Looking at her with one hand on her hip & one on the bottle all those things fade away but not for something like love as I’ve ever imagined it but more like a cataclysmic jumbling of a million won’t fit moments of her & I & neither of us all at once which momentarily drives me into a delirious frenzy searching for a period I spill my drink.

Thoroughly dumbstruck I stare at her. Politely wiping up my mess she pours me another, on the house, with the slow warm smile of dusk in the fall.