manuscripts
Welcome to the latest volume of Manuscripts, a throwback issue.

Some Manuscripts traditions fall out of style, but we decided to resurrect one this year. In the earliest issues of Manuscripts (est. 1933), the covers and interior illustrations were student-made woodblock prints. Upon discovering a dusty issue from this era on a bookshelf in the seminar room, we decided to honor our roots. Camille Bates, our design extraordinaire, created multiple prints by hand—one of which is our beautiful cover.

We are excited to announce a new section in Manuscripts—a featured piece from the Butler Writers program—a collaboration between Indianapolis Public Schools and the Butler English Department. In the class “Writing in the Schools,” Butler students volunteer on-site at Shortridge High School where they act as mentors to high schoolers in an after-school creative writing club. We were so impressed by the writing produced by the Shortridge students that we wanted to offer them another space to showcase their work.

Of course, we continued our other traditions as well. We hosted our annual Literary Magazine Summit in the fall and our Literary Festival in the Spring. Thank you to poet Donika Kelly and author Michael Poore for meeting with our staff and judging our annual contests.

Manuscripts prides itself on being student-run, and I want to thank the staff for trudging up to the third-floor of Jordan each week to read and discuss the many submissions we received. I also want to thank the executive board for their hard work, and I’m excited to see where they take the magazine next. Thank you to Nancy Colburn, Anne Minnich-Beck, and the English department for their continued support as well.
Manuscripts always strives to bring new and interesting ideas to our magazine, and this year is no different. We began this year by switching to a new submission manager, hosted on our Digital Commons website (which also received an upgrade!). We want to extend a very big thank-you to Irwin’s Scholarly Communication librarians, Olivia MacIsaac and Jennifer Raye, for all their help.

Lastly, after six years as the magazine’s faculty advisor, Bryan Furuness is stepping down. Manuscripts wouldn’t be half the organization it is today without his guidance and help. On behalf of both present and past staff members, I want to extend a special thank-you for all that he’s done for the magazine over the years.

Without further ado, we invite you to enjoy the 2019 volume of Manuscripts.

Maggie Brodbeck
Manuscripts Editor-in-Chief
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I need to tell you something.
Last night the family had a bonfire
and across from me sat my cousin,
whose pale young face the fire had plucked out
from the night, like the full moon,
and in his hands, next to his drunk father,
was a matchbox, and when an 8-year-old finds matches
a match will be struck, and so it was,
but since his father, my uncle, was on his way
to get a refill, he didn’t see the way
my cousin’s eyes lit up before the flame
like I did, but soon the flame died out,
and he flicked the charred-black body
into the fire, and while he did so I was watching
my uncle pour another beer, admiring his skill despite his state,
he held his mug at just an angle
so as not to spill the foam,
then as match #2 was to be struck, I said,
across the fire, “Abel, if you hold the match
upside-down but at an angle, it will burn for longer,”
and saw his blue eyes snap to mine, a nod,
then flick, and the flame climbed up
toward his little knuckles, closing in just as
his father sat back down, and he shook it out
and tossed the charred-black body in the fire,
and my uncle spilled some beer as he sat down,
and Abel lit another match, and this
is why I’m telling you this, because
I cannot get this image out,
the flame is climbing up and up,
again and time again it climbs
until Abel runs out of matches
and he sits there strange,
next to his drunk father,
feeling out of place and lost
without something burning in his hand.
When I was a kid visiting America I would chase my shadow across the sidewalk in front of my grandma’s house in Southern Indiana. The pavement there was smooth, the monolithic remains of the cookie-cutter suburb movement.

You wouldn’t think this concrete had held the feet of a thousand migrations—you wouldn’t think that I would be so fascinated by my own shadow. Back then I only chased my shadow in America, where the pavement was conducive to seeing how black a shadow can be.

Red dirt in Kenya is an arms-open lover, gathering sunlight in its folds, making no discrimination against the feet that step across it. But in Southern Indiana, the pavement is flat, defined against the grass, and reflects every shadow of every shadow. Pounding feet, I chased my shadow across the sidewalks of Indiana. My black shadow. My permanent shadow.
My grandmother holds my hand as we sit on the front porch and in the warm dusk whispers in my hair
*Bote enteryè,* beautiful soul. My skin drinks in her words, downtrodden and parched from the American Dream drought. Her blessings are potent in the golden hour of the sun and I remember the superstitions my family carved into my skin. To fear the dark and stay weary of stranger’s homes, their demons cling to your clothes like beggar tick seeds and plant themselves in your aura.
I remember the way they weaved the prophecies and prayer through my braids. How my lullabies told me that dreams were omens of times to come and to heed their words, no matter how bitterly they went down.
I learned that revenge and spite is okay, though no one else believes so. *Bay kou bliye, pote mak sonje,* the one who strikes the blow might easily forget, but the one who wears the scars must remember.
encased
i have waited
since sun’s first day
to slay my goliath

god’s face was the first i saw
he chipped me free
grain by crude grain

consciousness
then pain
a toenail
a vein
when it was done
he wept at my feet

yet who am i to stand above
why should you marvel at me
perfect marble boy
not dead not alive
stuck
in some wild-eyed place

yes yes beat me there
see my left foot crumble
no tear can fall from my silent eye
i am just a rock
and my god just a man
and faith
and rage
and a stone
are all i have
In February it was too cold for bees but they showed up anyway.

My dad stepped on a hole in the ground and was stung 5 times in the leg

The bees filled the room of feathers and the chapters written by them

Nikos saw them drown in honey

Tyler stands in a field of suns watching them fearlessly

They take over my mom’s summer flower box beneath our window seat

I peered over the drain where the charm fell through. I’d managed to catch the others that hung on the same chain. I felt the hum before I heard it. I braced myself against the sink and watched the bees fly out of the opening where the green had disappeared. That was the first week they followed me. I took them wherever I went: they clogged the drain while I showered, flew up through my straw during lunch, carried me on my bed while I slept. I don’t pay them much mind anymore. The buzz I don’t hear until he walks past and suddenly the vibrations make it too hard to stand. I always thought dreams were meant to be followed but for weeks I slept in darkness and my compass pointed down.
Sylvia Plath took up beekeeping in June. She did not make it through the winter.

•

I knew it was going to end that Tuesday at practice. I hadn’t seen you in a few days and you weren’t making any effort to speak to me unless I spoke first. It’s four months later but it would have been 365 days. I found your sweaters in the back of my closet. That is all.

I have nothing left of you, just the clothes you once wore and the photos we once took. For months your name was stuck in my throat and only now is the blue leaving my face.

•

Sometimes the bees just watch me and I don’t even notice them. I know they’re there though, and I know that they check in on you, too, but you don’t know what their sting feels like.

•

I called on Thursday after not seeing him for a week. He didn’t want to talk. He didn’t want to listen, either. He went every Monday and Friday to play and she was there. It felt like he knew exactly what had happened and why he was leaving but he didn’t—wouldn’t—tell me. But it’s hard to breathe through someone else’s tears.

February was cold and so was March and April but I put my winter coat in the attic today. I didn’t have time to write you a letter.

•

When Pharaoh forced young Moses to decide between gems and coal, he chose to speak with a certain unsteadiness. When my tongue was swollen from the bee stings, I chose to speak with written words.

It is believed by some that a swarm of bees was to be avoided because while the swarm was on the move, they were carrying messages and doing the biddings of the gods. As I cried my tears turned to bees, delivering messages to the pages. Sometimes I beg them to stop because I can’t see myself in the mirror anymore, “please bees, not now. please, stop” and the trails on my face turn to honey.
His sweaters, I don't know if they fit me as well anymore. I don't know if it's due to the cold it lets in or his memory, or maybe something inside of me, that my body can't regulate warmth as bumps rise from my arms.


Did you ever care Chris? Which planet did you land on? I keep receiving letters from the bees, messengers between worlds, but it's in a code I can't understand.


I let the bees follow me wherever they want, now. I didn't ever really have that choice but I'm okay with it now, with seeing them always.

They went with me from my house to his house, then the moments we shared, to the memories we will always have, and then back to my house where he doesn’t visit anymore. I let the rest of them fly back to the water and the sand and the lagoon where we first sat, watched them fly away. Their hums made a vibration of pain and love mixed together that I felt in my bones. The following day, as I left the floor of my room, the sky made the same sound.

As I lie trembling, naked on my floor, the cold seeped in and the sweaters stared at me unable to help.


Aristaeus was the god of the bees. He chased Eurydice when she was bitten by a serpent and died. Her nymph sisters punished him. His bees began to sicken and die. To the fountain Arethusa he went, where he was advised to establish altars, sacrifice the cows, and leave their dead carcasses. From them came new swarms of bees. Hades was the god of the Underworld, to which the bees bridge to the natural world, like the River Styx.

I think of the bees I let fly away by the lagoon with the ducks. How the air blows them back towards me. They keep speaking to me, but I can't understand. Stand tall and steady. Bones shaking with their buzzes. The pentagons hold the sweetness they give us for free, rub into my skin let whatever wishes stick to me because not much else will.
Did my love just not count as high as you could? Thirty-four weeks left your head so quickly it was as if it never happened. What a beautiful dream. When you drove away from my house, you stole a year of my life with you. What a beautiful dream. A beautiful murder of a dream, taking a part of me that I didn’t have time to reach myself. I used to try to stretch towards it but I tore muscles reaching that far. I keep walking.

•

Once, bees kept our flowers alive and which kept springs alive. And now they follow me. So I keep on listening. Just in case their language begins to make sense in my head.

•

It was said that when Hades took her, while she leaned down to pluck a flower, he rose from the Underworld, grabbed her and left the world up above. Demeter threatened to take fertility from the earth, and thus an agreement was born; the seasons changed. Winter fills the void of Persephone.

Death must occur in order for life to begin again because poor Persephone was fooled into a false love that shielded her from the flowers and trees that wanted to bloom but had to wait.

I wonder if the bees that rose from the carcasses are the same that follow me. If that which was a second chance was passed on to Aristaeus wrongfully.

•

I went back to the lagoon where we once sat. A new touch dowsed my hand in alcohol, cleansed me of the words and love I once bathed in. I am not where I am now that I was with you. I am not stuck in February, and the dark winter whipping around my hair and thoughts is now warm May. But some days that winter returns. I unravel a sweater and knit it back together. I let the cold melt. Come May again, I fold it gently into the back of my closet, visiting the bees who hide while I close my eyes, soaking my skin with warm honey.
Being God is hard.
One sneeze and the kid’s got three legs,
someone’s Mom has metastatic cancer;
and—oh right, world hunger.
Honest, I smited four kids in the first minute
then my privileges were revoked
by the people’s disbelief
until I remembered—hold it,
I’m God, like a sock is a sock.
You can tell the sock it’s not there
but what’s a sock to care? It is
whether you acknowledge the sock or not
so I carry on
weary, wearing a too-used pair of shoes
like that one kid always two blocks behind the bus
hurting down the street in the rain
a minute too late.
Yesterday, as the bus turned the corner,
he lied down, traded his eyeballs for cement
and went to sleep.

I too have watched that bus turn.
I too have wept.
It is 7:35 pm when I get the text.

*Cass: pregame in drews room come down

*Cant. Chem test Monday sry b:(

Turning my attention to the splay of papers in front of me, I start to sift through chapter three of eight that I still need to look over. I swear, not even five seconds later, I hear the unmistakable sound of my phone’s vibration. I sigh before answering her call on the third ring.

“Ava! Get your ass down here, girl! It’s Friday night, have a little fun!” Cassidy screams in my ear, making it evident she has already started her version of ‘fun.’ She wasted no time forgetting about her homework this weekend. Like she always said, “Ain’t no shame in an early pregame.” My eyes graze over the list of formulas I had just written down in my notes before putting my head into my hands and letting out an exasperated sigh.

“Cass, you know I can’t. I just have too much.”

“Come onnnnn …. Carter will be here,” she teases. It is as if I can see the smile form on her lips through the line.
Honestly, I can’t believe how easily I gave up. Actually, I can. It’s probably because at that moment I would rather do anything besides chem. Hell, I would be content just watching paint dry. After taking four chemistry classes over the course of my entire life, “chemisery” is a term I am well acquainted with. I am burnt out. I deserve a break, right? I start to create an itinerary: I would hang out for a few hours, nurse a beer, and then get right back to work around 10:30-11. Plus, it’s just a kickback with friends. I’d be safe, right?

That was my first mistake.

•

I don’t know why I hate the rain. Fall and Spring are the worst—they’re our wet seasons here. I remember when I was six and the transformer blew at school. My first-grade teacher, Mrs. Cunningham, had to sit with me in the dark for all of recess because I was crying so hard. She had told my mom she had never seen such an outburst from a student before. She suggested therapy, but Momma said it was just a phase that would pass with time. She was wrong.

There was another time at my Oma’s house when it stormed. Oma means ‘grandma’ in German. (She said it was because it was easier to say, but Opa thought that it was because she didn’t like how old she felt being called a grandmother. She is a proud woman in that sense.) Anyways, it was a perfectly clear day. The sun was shining, and there wasn’t a single cloud in the sky, but Opa said he could feel it about to storm in his bones. In his bones! Sure enough, not even two hours later it started to rain. I’ve read that animals can sense it, too. That’s why Mama made me put the horses in the stable when they started bucking and acting all strange. It was a pretty good sign that a thunderstorm was approaching.

Over the years, I’ve started to pick up on the signals: the way the sparrows and squirrels closed themselves in the bird boxes Opa and I made and how the cat would go hide in the shed. The air would smell funny, too, like that warm grassy smell you just have to experience for yourself. It would stick to your lungs the way one’s thighs stick to a leather car seat, leaving behind a sort of humid dewiness. Something about certain scents just linger around like that even miles away when you thought you’ve escaped them, and it isn’t until you smell it again that you’re taken back to those specific moments. I guess that’s what rain would do to me. It gave off this feeling of hiding like the squirrels did. I felt trapped, helpless even, at the smell.
“Look who finally showed up!”

I am greeted by a clamor of voices and Cass’s head colliding with my collarbone in a warm but clumsy embrace before I take my spot on Drew’s bed. At this point, Drew tells me he has already cut Cass off and for good reason. Drew is practically holding his girlfriend up at this point. He sets her down on the extra bed in his room before addressing me. “Where have you been?” Drew asks as he hands me a cold one from the fridge, pops the tab and plops down beside me.

“She’s been studying like a loser!” Cass slurs, before getting distracted and laughing at something on her phone. I shake my head—girl really can’t handle her liquor. I mean, I wasn’t that much bigger than her, but I’d never been this bad off beer. “Yeah, basically though. Hawkins scheduled a Monday exam.” I roll my eyes as I take a sip, letting the malty texture coat the back of my throat.

“Nerd.” Drew replies. “Shoulda just dropped his class when ya had the chance like I did, but hey, it’s Friday. Live a little.” He shrugs, downs his beer, crushes the can on his forehead, and shoots it in the trash. He gives me one of those “I’m hot shit” looks and I roll my eyes.

I’d known Drew since my first day at Bradley. He had offered to help carry some of my boxes up to my dorm for me. I had been really scared for starting college so far away from my home in South Carolina and Drew made me feel like it wouldn’t be so bad. He had become the brother I never had. He was the reason I met Cass. They had been dating since seventh grade. They were the epitome of the term “relationship goals.” If only my ex could have taken some tips from them.

“So what’s this thing you got going on with Carter? Gotta know if I’m gonna have to fight him. I mean, we both know he doesn’t stand a chance against these guns.” He says pulling me into a chokehold and half-flexing.

“Weakkkkkk! Do you even lift, bro?” I squeal through a ragged breath. Drew could easily R’KO me right here. He was one of those guys who bought protein powder by the bulk and got up at 5 every morning to go lift but would never actually fight anyone. He let me go and started laughing.

“But really, what is going on?” He asks.

I shift a little on the bed.
Honestly, I don’t know what it was that Carter and I were doing. We hung out sometimes after class, but I wasn’t sure what entirely we were. We had kissed maybe twice, but that was really it. I guess we were friends with benefits—limited benefits that is.

“I honestly couldn’t tell ya. Too soon to tell I guess.” I shrug my shoulders and finish off my beer. That was as much as I knew to be true. I had just gotten out of a long-term relationship where the boy had cheated on me because he “didn’t know how hard long distance would be.” Carter was nice though. He wasn’t like my usual taste in guys. He was more spontaneous, and I liked that about him. I wasn’t sure if I was ready to jump into a relationship right now, but I did enjoy his company.

“But you like him, right? I just don’t want you to—”

“Ayyyyyy, I brought the good stuff!” A voice bellows, turning our attention to the door. A tall boy with chocolate brown hair and green eyes walks in with a bag over his head. He’s wearing an oversized white Red Sox jersey which is unbuttoned to reveal a fitted white Hanes tee underneath—classic frat boy outfit. A large number sixteen is on his back,—Andrew Benintendi. Not a bad choice, I think.

“Carter!” Cassidy screams, holding her red cup up high before making her way over to the fridge. Drew whispers something to her, probably about how she should drink some water because she starts to pout and head back to her bed. Carter is pouring out double shots and throwing them back like it’s water. He hands one to Drew, then looks at me. He nods, motioning to the shot glass in front of me. “Ava.”

I shake my head. “I’m good. I think I’ll just stick with beer tonight. I got an exam I have to study for later.” Drew starts to step in, but Cass whispers something in his ear and drags him away toward her.


“Dang, girl. Easy.” He smirks as he pours another. “One more.” I know I shouldn’t, but his smile is so contagious, and I don’t wanna be a buzzkill.
“One more.” I tease. He hands me the glass and shakes his head.

I throw my head back. This time my vision gets a little fuzzy and I can no longer taste the mango, only the burning feeling of regret.

“Are you sure you don’t wanna go to Sig with us?” Cass asks. She’s seemed to have bounced back pretty well. Water is a godsend, I swear.

“Nah. I should probably head back. See ya later. Be safe.” I shout before trying my best “I’m sober” face and heading out the door.

“Wait, Ava!” Carters says, lightly grabbing my arm. I feel the goosebumps hatching from his touch. “Maybe after, I can drop by. Ya know, give ya a break from studying.” His voice is sweet like honey.

“Yeah sure. See ya then,” I whisper. I walk the rest of the way to my room with a huge smile on my face.

I pull back the curtains and peer out the window at the rain outside. The sound of water picked up by the passing cars echo off the street below. The smell of wet pavement muddled with dirt wafts into my room. It’s enough to make me sick to my stomach. I’m cranking the windows shut when there’s a knock at my door. “Coming!” I shout. The wind picks up, causing the rain to collide against the pane of glass as I make my way to the door. Carter is leaning against the doorframe and his hair is a little damp, most likely a mix of sweat and rainwater. I open the door wider to let him in. He staggers past me and falls on my bed face first without even a “hello” my way.

A steady drizzle of water pitters against the window pane, and a soft glow of light from my lamp fills the dorm room. There’s a blue tint to the room as Twister drones on the television atop my dresser. We’re at the part where Jo’s father gets pulled into the tornado to his death. It’s quite sad, actually, for that to be last time she ever sees her father. I make a mental note to call my mother soon.

Carter is splayed out on my twin bed, sloshed out of his mind. His clothes are also wet, which leads me to hoping it’s just water, but
the stench of alcohol coming off of him has me believing otherwise. He had asked to come hang out after whatever frat party he decided to pay a visit tonight. That was actually how we met. One of the first weeks of school, I had gone with a friend to some party to meet more people on campus, and he was that kind of charismatic charmer that you couldn’t help but want to be around. That was then. No one really likes to hang around drunk people when they’re sober. After a while, they stop being funny and more of just a stressor that I would have to take care of. Given he was hardly ever sober, I probably should have known that this was a bad situation from the start.

Personally, I have no problem with people drinking. I am more lenient than my mother when it comes to alcohol. She hates it—doesn’t even allow it in her house. She said she never understood why people would willingly drink something that makes them throw up their lunch and forget what they did the night before. She’s under this impression that people become a completely different person with liquor running through their veins—like Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde different. She said too many people who drink become someone they said they would never be under the substance, and she didn’t want to expose herself or me to that. I mean, I guess it makes sense. I, too, have seen people flip like a switch with a startling night and day effect, but I still think it can be done responsibly. You can’t just close yourself off to everything that scares you, but I understand where she’s coming from, too.

Her nickname is one that has stuck with me throughout the years as well. People called her “Snow White” in high school because she wouldn’t even drink a sip. I admire her not only because she is a proud woman who’s stayed true to her values but also because of how strong she is. When my father passed away, she held herself so well. Honestly, I don’t really remember my father. Over the years, his voice and face got distorted into mere photographs and old home movies until it became how it was now: a ghost-like shell of a man I didn’t know anymore. I had started to forget details in old memories of him, and it was a frustrating time. Now, I don’t even try to recall them. He had died when I was five—heart attack, my mother said. It was quite hard on our family. Without a second source of income, my mom had to pick up extra hours at work, and being how young I was, I spent most of the days after school with my grandparents. Oma and Opa basically raised me. Oma taught me how to cook good food with basically anything in your pantry, and Opa taught me to fish and drive.
Don’t get me wrong, I had a good childhood. I grew up a little quicker, but she tried to keep everything as normal as possible. She wanted me to do what was best for me, even if that was sheltering me from “the evils of the outside world.” That included alcohol. She wouldn’t have the stuff in the house. I didn’t have my first sip of alcohol until I turned eighteen, and even then, I wasn’t much of a drinker. Maybe a drink or two every other month. I definitely wasn’t one to bar hop like Carter and my friends did. I didn’t really see the point in it all. I guess some things my mother instilled in me had stuck.

I’m brought back to reality by Carter’s touch on the small of my back. He pulls me towards him and caresses my neck with the tip of his nose. “Ava, babyyyy,” he whispers. “Avaaa.” His voice trails off as he kisses his way down my neck and into my collarbone before making his way to my lips. His lips are rough and taste of whiskey. It smells so familiar. I can’t quite place it, but it makes me cringe.

“Carter, watch the movie okay?” He pouts and traces circles on my thigh. “Carter, the movie,” I say a little more sternly. He doesn’t seem to hear—or doesn’t want to—as he continues to move on top of me. I push him away, shaking my head, but it doesn’t stop him. He sloppily fumbles toward my bra strap. His hands are the cold kind of clammy. “Ava babyyyy, I want you .... I love you..” He insists between kisses. Turning my head to create some distance, I try again, but he’s got me pinned. “I love you.” Kiss. “Ava.” Kiss. “It’s okay ... it’s okay.” He repeats like a broken record. His grip on my wrist is so tight, I can feel my skin rolling on top of the bone as he shoves my hand down the waistband of his jeans.

It’s funny, really, how deer freeze when a car’s headlights hit them. Opa says that the light momentarily blinds them and they don’t know what else to do. When I was young, it always baffled me why they didn’t just run away—escape the so-called danger into the darkness beyond our dim halos cast by my grandpa’s pick-up truck and into the woods. Maybe they are just being overly cautious and don’t want to turn their backs on us just yet. I could understand that. I, too, have a few trust issues.

Oma says that their whole life can flash before their eyes in those few seconds. She used to have me count how long they stood there to figure out their ages. A deer with five vivid memories would have lived at least ten years. A rule of thumb, she said, was to double the number of memories for the age. I’d count a second per memory,
but I imagined that the filler memories came as fast as their heartbeat. I just wonder if their hearts were pounding as much as mine was now.

I take a moment to concentrate on my breathing and count.

One. When I was in preschool, I could have sworn that I could see tigers when I closed my eyes. I don’t think my teacher believed me when I told her. She said that it was all in my head—that I was imagining it. But nothing has ever been more constant in my life than the lines of little orange and black tigers marching across my eyelids. I would talk to them some nights—tell them of my day, and in turn, they would tell me of theirs. Now obviously, they didn’t actually speak to me—that part I know was just my imagination playing tricks on me, but sometimes late at night, I can see them. I think they are still looking after me, even now.

Two. There was this one time when I was four years old. It had snowed around eight inches that night before. I wanted to go outside so badly. I ended up bugging my father until he finally gave in. We put on layer after layer, strapped on our snow boots and ventured out into the cold. It was one of my favorite memories: gripping on to the edges of a black plastic sled as he drove around the yard on the four-wheeler. The air froze my face into a constant smile. I couldn’t feel my cheeks for hours after and I don’t think I even cared. After the third face plant, Dad stopped and dusted me off, laughing. He then helped me build a snow tunnel to hide from the wind, but when it fell in on me, my mother would yell at him for being “careless” and whatnot. Apparently, I could have died or something. She always did like to ruin our fun.

Three. It was my fifth birthday party. I had invited a few of my friends over to celebrate. We all had matching SpongeBob party hats on and little yellow fake leis around our necks. We all chowed down on a rich chocolate cake my mother had decorated, icing and crumbs all over our faces. However, the happiness didn’t last long. Chocolate and presents can’t silence the arguing we heard coming from the kitchen. It couldn’t stop me from watching as my father burst through the door, green bottle in hand, and stagger over to me. He kissed me on the forehead. A “Happy birthday, Princess” escaped his lips and he patted me on the head before stumbling out the front door. I didn’t know what to do. I could feel the eyes of my friends like beams directed into my soul and this huge headlight on me. And what did I do, you ask? I froze.

Just like how I was now.
I couldn’t tell the boy no. He’s guiding my hand now, his eyes in the back of his head in ecstasy. He claws at my bare back with his other hand, and I wince. He doesn’t seem to care. I’m still in horror as his nails dig into my flesh and I yelp in pain. I can feel the grooves he’s left on my skin. It was his way of making sure his touch would linger. I don’t know what to do so I close my eyes and focus on the earthy smell of the liquor on his breath, taste of butterscotch on my tongue, and I keep counting.

Four. Opa and I are on the porch swing waiting for the sun to peek out over the bean field. I must have been around nine years old. There’s an overwhelming smell of hazelnut wafting from the cup of coffee in his hand. I loved that smell. It made me feel safe. Opa wasn’t much of a talker in the mornings. He was usually content just watching the fog clear, but today was different. “You’re a strong girl, Ava. You know that right?” Not once does he look at me, just stares straight ahead and continues. “It’s not the experiences in life that make us who we are, it’s how we handle them.” I blankly stare at him, confused by his words. He points off in the distance. I follow his finger. Hunkered down in the grass about 300 yards away was a whitetail deer. “You see that deer over there, Ava. See how its head is tilted up?” I nod. “It’s smelling the air for danger.”

“Danger?” I ask, and for the first time all morning he glances at me.

“Yeah, danger. Deer have a heightened sense of smell. Their experiences make them sense certain dangers and they flag their tail as a warning to others. You get what I’m saying, Ava?” He lets out a heavy sigh as if he’s questioning whether to finish his thought or not. Clearing his throat, he whispers, “People are like deer sometimes.”

Five. The rain hits the metal roof of my house with the energy of a tidal wave. The sky is that dangerous kind of beautiful: greens and purples twisted into amber reds “like Nature’s own take on an Amaretto Sunrise” my father called it. I never knew that was the name of a drink until I was older. I guess in some instances, ignorance truly is bliss.

I am five years old and hiding on the staircase. I had heard my dad’s car door shut and stumbled down the stairs waiting to greet him. I wasn’t prepared for what happened next.

The door slams and my father shuffles in with his hair messy and tired eyes. He seems to have aged twenty years since morning. There is a
half-empty green bottle in his right hand. He downs it and tosses it aside. Fumbling his way toward the fridge, he pulls another bottle out, pops the top. He seems lost in thought as I watch him standing there like that in the middle of the room. Another streak of electricity etches across the sky in branches that resemble the veins on his neck as he presses the long-neck bottle to his lips. I’d never seen him like this before.

The flash of light is enough to catch the cream Jameson label on the bottle, his favorite. I can’t watch him like this anymore. I run towards him hugging his hips. I must’ve caught him off guard because he sways over further than I expect before bending down slowly and holding my shoulders for support. “Ava baby, what’re you doing up? I want you to go upstairs now, baby, okay? I want you to get in bed and go to sleep now, ya hear?” He slurred. His breath smells funny, like the taste of those awful butterscotch candies my mother liked so much. The light cast shadows on his scruff. He didn’t shave this morning. Usually he shaved before leaving for work “to protect the princess from tickles”, but tonight the coarse black hair stippled his chin.

“Can you read me a bedtime story?” I ask.

He smiles up at me.
“Didn’t your mama already read you one tonight?”

I nod.

“What one?” His voice is softer, barely audible if I had not been waiting for his reply.

“The Velveteen Rabbit.”

“Ohhh. That’s a good one. Did you finish it?”

I nod.

“Okay then, off to bed then,” he concludes, and with one hand on my back, I am guided toward the staircase. He kisses me, tickling my forehead with the start of his beard. “Goodnight, princess,” he mumbles and gestures his head up. I comply and start up the stairs to my room.

When the shadows completely cover me, I glance back. He shuffles back to the kitchen before sitting at the table with his head resting
in his hand. He looks so sad. I am about to turn around when some-
thing shiny catches me eye. Through the lightning, I can make out a
glossy black handle peeking out from behind his hand. But as quickly
as I make it out, the light is gone, and I’m left in the dark. I feel my way
up the stairs and down the corridor to my bedroom.

I ascend the last few stairs and get under my covers, listening
to the storm outside. A deep crack thunders from downstairs and a jolt
of yellow zaps through the sky. A few seconds later I hear my mother
scream.

Carter is lying on my bed sound asleep. A slight snore escapes
his lips. The thunderstorm has picked up outside. I listen to the dron-
ing roar of water hitting the windowpane and look outside. The sky is
that dangerous kind of beautiful: greens and purples twisted into am-
ber reds “like Nature’s own take on an Amaretto Sunrise.” This time, I
knew what it tasted like. A fork of lightning sets the sky ablaze, and the
rumbling of thunder reverberates in the distance. I shudder and think
of the lessons my grandparents taught me. For the first time, I knew
what my Opa meant so long ago and for that I was grateful. People
were like deer sometimes. And my Oma—my Oma was wrong about
one thing. You can’t tell how old a deer is based on how many vivid
memories they have, but then again, maybe you could learn something
even more telling. Maybe you find a piece of you that your mind buried
a long time ago. Something that your brain tried to protect you from.
Minds are beautiful like that. Intricate and confusing in ways that we
are still trying to understand. Even now, all I’m really sure of is that
Drew might get into his first fight, and I remember why I hate the rain.
Seize a handful of hemlocks, and pull yourself along those massive rocks.

Stumble behind his stable steps, and lie to yourself:
trust your body.

Strip seedlings of their needles, to seep humiliation from their wounds.

Scratch against those rocks, and hope he doesn't hear...
hit the ground.

Scream for him to leave, let you wither in the next frost, alongside those broken hemlocks.

Softly place your cold, purple knuckles in his ears.

Tell him to listen.
I know death well.
She sat with my ancestors on the slave ships
kissing their lips as they were thrown
off-board, whispering lullabies
to make the fall a little softer.
She raised my family in her bosom,
feeding them strife and sadness
for so long that spiders pooled
in their bellies, famished.
She held their left hands
as they killed with their right
and held the flag of their
independence between her blackened legs.
I wouldn’t consider her a friend.
But she knows me better than a mother.
For years, it felt like we had finally evaded
her grasp. Yet here, we find her as our matriarch.
I know death well, though she has yet to touch me.
Yet, the child says nothing, but what it heard by the fire.
I suppose it’s musical, death,
like a too-many-stringed lyre
or really hopeful-looking firearms
when blood plumes like cloth from a magician’s throat—
too many broken-colored sailboats.
Trances like these drip honey-slow
so I transcend reality,
a hoop-earring time-warp & it’s the 70s but not
the ones your parents pretend to remember
as history unrolls itself like a red rug.
Here, if it burns, it burns.
The ice cream man eats the ashes.
The liquor store has one elongated aisle where whiskey and vodka roost together. While the fluorescent bulbs hum above me I stare at the bottles. What if I stretch my arm out until my fingertips brush the cold metal on the back of the shelf and

_run_ with my arm locked in place so bottles explode on the tile floor; my sneakers squeaking as I run through the raspberry vodka _through_ the opaque liquors _through_ the margarita mixers that bounce in their plastic _through_ rum _through_ gin _through_ things I haven’t heard of all the way down the aisle until there are no more bottles to tip over and sharp glass leaves float in alcoholic puddles. Why not be brave? My fingers tingle.
Google

I’ve had access to and used Google for as long as I can remember. I’ve googled everything from formulas for math class to, more recently, convoluted essay topics for information. I like to search things online because I can get a clear cut and simple answer. I might have to poke around a little bit to get my answer, but I’ll get it. I can get sources to support that answer, and when I share it with others, they can search the same question and back up my answer. The internet lets me put out my opinions, my questions, my feelings, into a huge never-ending void where strangers can pick them up and examine them. They can argue, agree, answer, and validate what I’ve sent out into the internet, giving me attention or ignoring me. I can feel seen through the internet and, sometimes, I need to be seen.

Prose Contest - Third Place

8TH GRADE SEARCH HISTORY

NATALIE H. URBAN
How to Conjugate Ser

Ser is the Spanish verb for “to be” in a permanent sense, as opposed to estar which is “to be” in a changeable way. Ser describes characteristics, profession, age, and other similarly hard to change features of people, places, and things. In class my teacher asks us to describe ourselves with ser, using our new vocabulary of adjectives to tell those around us who we are and what we’re like. I am lots of different things. I am an intelligent and kind girl. I am funny sometimes. I am short. I am a brunette. I am in 8th grade. I am thirteen. I am single. All sentences I can use ser to describe. It’s a short, incomplete list of who I am, but I’m afraid of what a completed list could hold.

What Channel is ABC family DirectTV

Things change. For example, your cable company changes. Maybe because the rates were better, or you were tired of dealing with the customer service that didn’t help. Regardless, a change was made, and you have to adjust. Relearn all the habits that used to be natural, such as typing in 300 and knowing you’d be changing to HGTV and that the movie channels are in the 600s. Suddenly your channel menu is an unknown world and you lost the guide they gave you when they installed your new cable. So, you run to your old friend, the internet, and hope that someone had the sense to put the channel list online, so you don’t have to waste time channel surfing. Lucky for you, they did, and you can enjoy Harry Potter weekend in peace.
How to tell if my crush likes me back

My crush of the year program was in full swing back in junior high. I had just unceremoniously dumped my boyfriend who I hadn't wanted to date. He asked me out in front of everyone and saying no wasn’t an option, so instead I pretended to be okay with it for a few months and then got the hell out of there. My current crush was Gavin. We liked the same music, he was fairly smart, and he was accessible. So, he was the new crush of the year. At sleepovers and girl-only hang outs he was the topic of my gossip and my friends and I examined every interaction with him.

If I was being honest, I didn’t particularly care what he thought of me. I thought he was pretty cool, but if nothing ever came of my crush, I wasn’t going to be heartbroken. In fact, no crush had left me heartbroken. I just eventually forgot I was supposed to have one and then at the next gossip session centered around boys I would drop the first name that came to mind and keep him as my crush until I forgot about this one as well. I never really flirted, we would just hang out as friends—after all, we liked the same things. We were on a science team together, we had a bunch of classes together. As I said, he was convenient. Eventually, he was forgotten, like every other crush I had chosen, and I moved on. Who knows if he ever knew I had a crush on him or if I really had one at all.
Am I Gay Test

This is in every queer kid’s search history at some point. Nobody wants to have to do the soul searching required to find an answer for themselves. Instead we find these tests that ask questions like “Imagine being married to someone, what gender are they?” and we key in the answers that have been ingrained in us from day one. When it asks if I’ve ever had a same sex crush, I think of a couple girls that make me nervous and giggly, and then click no. It asks what gender I see myself marrying and I think of how, when I dream of my wedding day, I can see everything but the groom. It’s just me standing at an altar with an empty suit floating next to me. I click opposite gender anyways. When I get to the end of the test, it proudly declares I’m straight or bisexual, depending on how honest I was that day. It never says I’m gay, but I never tell the whole truth. I took these tests to find the answers I wanted, not the truth.

While the internet can give us clear cut answers, there are somethings that you have to discover for yourself. While my life would’ve been infinitely easier if a letter had showed up in the mail that said “Congrats! You’re gay!” it never came. So, I dubbed myself questioning, since it was noncommittal. I could turn out to be straight so it held absolutely no risk. It was a label that wasn’t a label, leaving me in a limbo where I didn’t have to come out and I could keep on like I had been. No uncomfortable change necessary, no scary conversations with my family, no worry. I could just be, and nobody would ever have to know. The permeance of creating an “I am” statement was terrifying and alienating. I knew that if I ever came out, many spaces of my life had the capacity to become unsafe. My home, my church, my school. Instead I kept my vague label to myself and carried on lying to both myself and others.
How to memorize the books of the bible

In the Lutheran church, confirmation occurs in 8th grade. Confirmation is when you take charge of your connection with God. At birth my parents made a covenant with Him that they would raise me into Christianity by baptizing me and my confirmation was a way of saying “Hey God! They did it! I love Jesus and want to be a Christian!” Now my parents had always said it was my personal choice to get confirmed, that they had only raised me in Christianity so I would understand religion and be able to make an informed choice. Sunday school and confirmation classes were supposedly tools to make sure I had all the information so if I wanted to go through with it, I could. I was ready to say no, I didn’t want to get confirmed, I wasn’t interested with the church and in fact usually disagreed with the church.

Sometimes I even felt unsafe there. It was a place that created self-loathing, so I didn’t want to stay there if I didn’t have to. But, my mom made the announcement that despite any decision I made, I would be expected to come with the family to church every Sunday as it was good quiet reflection time and the basic lessons of it were good. I realized I couldn’t just say no and come every Sunday to see my pastors’ disappointed faces, have everyone know I never got confirmed, sit alone during communion while everyone else went to receive the blood and body of Christ. A stronger person would’ve said no. A stronger person would’ve gladly sat, head held high, in a church that openly hated them. I was not a stronger person. I wrote a speech I didn't believe and read it in front of everyone. Sat awkwardly while my whole family and pastors prayed over me for a God I didn't believe in. I smiled for the pictures but stopped smiling anywhere else.
Am I depressed

It was a fair question. I found myself sobbing alone at night, heaving in my bed because I couldn’t breathe and my brain wouldn’t stop racing. I sat in corners, hiding behind a wall of hair that slowly filled with snot and tears and I screamed at my parents when they demanded I tell them what was wrong. I told them I couldn’t tell them that it was mine to deal with, not theirs. Nothing made me happy and I was always angry, guilty, or sad. I read journals and articles and told myself I didn’t have enough of the symptoms. I was overreacting, it was just regular PMS or something like that. So, I never said anything about anything.

No matter what I felt, I always told white lies to make it more comfortable for everyone until I couldn’t even tell myself how I was feeling and 5 years later I’m still learning how to say things out loud regardless of any discomfort it causes others. My search history only holds half-truths because I lied to it in order to get the answers I wanted and while today I can say somethings out loud, I still tell myself lies and I still use Google.
On the sentimental days I read articles like “Top 10 Iconic African Trees” and their names are as natural on my tongue as the word mother.

The Jacaranda blooms in brief lavender bursts, a reminder of when the British colonizers hated the muted tones of the Marula—

I don’t know if they named it, but I know they named Mt. Kilimanjaro when they couldn’t pronounce the tribal nomenclature for the hill.

I pronounce baobab as its intended “boah-bab,” then mispronounce it like “bahh-oh-bab,” just to feel like I belong

in America, where my second grade teacher pronounces wildebeests like “wild-a-beasts,” because it’s all she knows.
SOMEONE, PLEASE TELL ME: WAS THIS SEXUAL ASSAULT?
KAREEN CASILLAS

*Author’s Note: Please take care of yourself when reading the following piece, as it may be triggering. Contains images of sexual assault.

1) I thought I was safe. Being twenty years old and fairly responsible, being fairly used to having my shit together, being in control of what I thought was healthy for me. I think it’s more of a “oh it happens to all of us” mentality…That could just be a way to cope.

2) “Just a second” – same thing the character said in the movie Higher Learning. It wasn’t brutal. It didn’t hurt. I obviously connected with him afterwards, and he made me orgasm several times before that.

3) I’m totally trying to negotiate with myself. I was comfortable after he promised not to come inside of me. I was worried about getting pregnant. That was my main concern. He said, “I figured if it were that big of a deal, you would’ve told me.”

4) It wasn’t the ‘r’ word. It couldn’t have been the ‘r’ word. Stop means stop. If she’s not reacting to you in a way that is positive (barely able to move around on her own because she’s so crossed), you shouldn’t tell her to “come here” and continue to fuck away. I was coherent. I knew what was going on. Was I in control? Hell no.

5) He made me feel special. He got what he wanted.

6) Have you ever seen the videos of birds attacking something from the sky? That’s how I feel towards him right now. I want to rip his flesh off with my claws. I’m torn, angry, and confused.
7) “But if you said it’s fine, you don’t need a condom, then it’s not assault.” I did say that, friend. After he pulled out and said it would take him longer. I didn’t want to take away from his pleasure. I put his above my own.

8) “I’ll give it my best not to get as drunk next time. There were a few moments where I felt too slow or sluggish to move as quickly as I wanted.” I texted him the next day.

9) They both got what they wanted and left me outside. The guys I’ve had sex with. Once they got what they wanted, things went south, and here I am begging for emotional attention and physical affection. I have trained him into knowing I’ll reach out to him first every time. That’s on me.

10) I am afraid of what it would do to them once they realized/I told them how badly they’ve hurt me. So I’d rather carry on with the pain than have them freak out. Why should I have to carry that burden? Gut reaction: I am a woman and there is an unspoken agreement between us that we carry emotional turmoil rather than our loved ones/people we care about. Why do you feel like you need to carry that weight? It’s not a need. It’s a want. I trick myself into thinking I can handle it. Is that a factor of my depression?

11) I pitied him for a while. Worried about his well-being in the future. How he would contend with the real world in five, ten, etc. years.

12) I told him to stop. Pushed up against him and thought to myself: “Where is his roommate? Can’t he hear me? Is this really happening?”

13) He tried to play it off as a compliment, later on. As if being inside of me felt so good, I was so tight that he didn’t want to stop, etc. That’s all bullshit.

14) It was my first experience with 100 proof alcohol. I had never smoked out of a bong. I kept telling him I didn’t want to fall asleep. I wanted to have sex but didn’t want to fall asleep before we could even get to that part.

15) I worried about getting home safely. The next day was one of the worst hangovers I’ve ever experienced. Slept on the guest bed without any sheets on it. That pissed my mom off a little bit.
16) He never apologized.

17) I am done retelling the story. I am tired. I just want to move on.

18) I am so tired.

19) I told him to stop.
INTERVIEW
WITH LAUREN GROFF
Author Lauren Groff has written multiple books, most recently *Florida* (2018), a finalist for the 2018 National Book Award in Fiction. Groff, who is currently a Suzanne Young Murray Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, has received numerous awards and recognitions, including her novel *Fates and Furies* (2015) being lauded as then-president Obama’s book of the year in 2015. During her visit to Butler, Groff sat down with Manuscripts staff member Matt Del Busto to discuss the importance of failure, the morality of the sentence, and the dynamic between the writer and the author.

Matt Del Busto is a senior English creative writing and Spanish major with a special love of black beans, getting up before sunrise, and dad jokes. After graduating from Butler in May, he plans to get an MFA in poetry, learn how to use his credit card, and get a laptop that works without being plugged in.

*Interview Date: 1.31.19*
INTERVIEW WITH LAUREN GROFF
WITH MATT DEL BUSTO

- Could I hear a little bit about your story to becoming a writer?

Sure. Like most writers, I was incredibly shy, just a very timid little girl. I loved books because I found in them a world I could control, and because I didn’t have to talk to people when I was reading. When I began to write, I thought I was a poet, but I didn’t know enough to write anything interesting. When I got to college, I learned I wasn’t, in fact, a poet, so I took a fiction class and that’s when I realized that fiction was what I really wanted to do.

- Did you study English in undergrad?

Yes, I was a dual major in English literature and French literature.

- Nice, that’s awesome. What sparked your interest in French literature?

I spent a year between high school and college in Nantes, France.

- Oh, wow.

It was lovely. Guy de Maupassant saved my life, because I was lonely and I didn’t speak the language very well. At the time there were bookstores where you could buy a book for five francs, which was about a dollar. I started reading French with Guy de Maupassant, and went on from there.

- There you go.

That’s what happened!

- So, I know you mentioned that you were interested in poetry first. Do you still find yourself reading or writing poetry or are you strictly fiction at this point?
I don’t write poetry, no, but I love reading it.

- **Sure.**

I think that prose writers need to be reading poetry. Reading poetry is a way of understanding how to sharpen your phrasing, how to use white space, how to do all sorts of things that if you just read prose you won’t ever learn how to do.

- **Yeah, of course.** Awesome, so I was reading through past interviews you’ve done just to get some inspiration for questions and you had this awesome interview with Cody Delastraty for Longreads a couple years ago—

He’s the loveliest, he’s really sweet.

- **It seemed like an awesome interview.** But one thing that you said in there was, “I almost never feel like I know what I’m doing, which is actually a really exciting and wonderful feeling.” I think that’s a feeling that’s really important for writers to be able to embrace. But, I think for most of us who are writers, that’s the last thing we want to embrace. How have you been able to embrace sitting in the unknown?

I think I had to change my idea about failure and what failure means. The older I get the more comfortable I am with it. What failure does is that it shows you the limits of what you think you can do so that you can either modify yourself or you can modify the thing that you want to be able to do. It’s a beautiful tool; embracing it is the way that you can change your perception of the work that you’re doing at the moment.

In early drafts, I’m writing something so that it can fail in an interesting way and show me what it is that I know and what I don’t know. Then, in embracing this disaster in front of me--being okay with the fact that it’s shitty and it’s a mess and it’s not going to be good in the state that it is in—I know that there will always be another draft that I’m going to finish to make the work less bad and less failed and less unknown. You slowly push your way through the process into a clearer conception of what you’re doing. But living within the unknown means living within the possibility of embarrassing yourself, of being ugly, and being okay with ugliness. I think that’s an important realization for any creative person to come to.
- So, you think it’s kind of a gradual learning process to accept that?

Yes. Particularly when we’re young we have these unrealistic expectations of youth and prodigy, where it seems as though, especially in the creative world, there’s an internal clock. But the truth is that we all need to put out a certain number of bad pages before we find the one that comes alive, and it doesn’t matter how long it takes for the page to start singing, as long as you’re committed to sitting there until it does. To have this feeling of pressure, this feeling that you need to be perfect on the first few passes, that seems very much to me like a young person’s perfectionism. The older you get the more comfortable you are with being okay with not being perfect the first time that you write something.

- Sure, and I listened to one interview where you said you do 10 to 12 drafts just long-hand before you start typing.

It’s a mess, I know.

- That’s a lot of writing. That’s impressive.

But you know, they’re not good drafts, they’re not interesting drafts and they don’t have full sentences. In fact, sometimes the first draft of anything is just like a handful of index cards.

- Sure.

And so it’s intentionally supposed to be erroneous and full of disaster.

- As you’re going through the drafting process, do you keep those old drafts for notes or is it something where you’ll write out however many pages and then you throw them out and then you know that you have that information in your head?

There have been times where I have gone back and thought, “Oh, maybe I said that better in the previous draft.” Every single time I think that, the reality is that, no, I said it better the second time around because I know more about the story; I know more about the characters; I know more about the room in which they’re sitting. Everything is enriched by the fact that I’ve been sitting with this story longer.

- Sure.
So you just throw it out, toss it out.

- **Is it cathartic to throw it away?**

Oh, it feels amazing.

- **Because you’re finally done with that?**

Yes, you’re done with the ugliness. Well, the next draft is still ugly, but at least it feels more beautiful.

- **When do you know that you’re ready to make that switch from writing longhand to typing it out?**

There’s always a moment when you realize that work has come alive, that you’re Dr. Frankenstein and the monster has twitched its head. It’s having the patience to get to that point where you’re able to just see the vital elements imposing themselves on you. Sometimes, it takes a long time; sometimes it only takes two drafts. It all depends on the project, but what is essential is the depth of listening, having the right quality of attention.

- **Why do you think it’s necessary to start long hand?**

Writing is physical; we pretend that it’s not by putting our early work on a computer. But we are physical creatures and everything we know is taken in through the body. I like to smell the paper, I like to smell the ink, I like to see the pores of the paper. I like to be invested in the work in a closer, more physical way because the physiology of typing is pushing the keyboard away; the sentences up to the blinking cursor look just like those on a perfect published page, right? It looks as though it’s almost already printed anyway.

- **It does.**

Writing longhand just allows you more capacity for error. I think it’s just a more beautiful process.

- **For sure. Going back to that Longreads interview you were talking about Véra Nabokov, and you mentioned just how interesting that character is and how it’d be possible to write a million different stories about her. That idea was interesting to me, and for any character who you’ve written drafts and drafts about, how do you**
decide which single story of theirs is the one that turns into the novel or the short story?

When you write a novel or short story, you’re making many millions of tiny decisions as you go through the drafting process. Obviously with a novel there are many more tiny decisions than with a short story, but each decision that you make has a causal relationship to every other decision that you’re making and eventually some of the decisions are closed off by what is the absolute right decision. There is a place you come to when you understand that this telling is more truthful because of all the doors that you’ve closed and all the windows that you’ve closed up to that point.

- You just mentioned short stories versus novels. How does the production process look differently to you between those two?

They’re massively different. A novel you carry around with you. It’s the little ape on your shoulder that you feed throughout the course of the day. Everything that you go through goes into the novel—you go to the grocery store and you see something that will maybe be tossed into the open mouth of the novel. And you do this for years. A novel usually takes many years to write.

I have learned up to this point—after years of failure—to keep the idea of a short story in my head for as long as possible because what happens then is that life enriches the story in your subconscious. There’s a certain point when the story becomes so urgent you can’t actually see anything else, you only see that story and not the novel, not the other things you’re doing, and you have to sit down to write the story. That’s when I know that the story is ready to be written.

I try to do the first draft of the short story in one sitting; what I like about the short story is the energy of surfing to the shore with a single wave of energy. There so many moving parts to the novel. There’s always something that you need to be working on, making better, rewriting. With the short story it’s really about the harnessing of a great deal of energy.

- Are you someone who pursues multiple projects at the same time?

Yes.

- Do you always have half a dozen different stories, all kind of—
Yes. I think that I'm actively trying to work on multiple things at one time because I love the way that stories sort of cross-fertilize underneath the surface of your consciousness. But also, most of the stories that I write I have tried in different ways, and they don't work out, so I have to throw them back in the compost.

-I think one thing about your writing that sticks out is the attention to detail, and maybe this is due in part to your inspiration from poetry, but that attention to detail specifically at the line level. How are you able to manage those minute details within the context of a three- or four-hundred-page novel?

The gorgeous thing about doing a project where you write a draft and throw it out, write and throw out, is that details and ideas sort of begin to accrete. They start to live. By the time that you’re done, you know the story. You can hold it in your hands, all the pieces of it, too, and all you have to do in the final part—all the other decisions have been made—is to sort of squeeze the sentences and make sure that they’re true and moral.

I think that making the right decision in terms of a sentence is moral decision. It’s making sure that you’re being as truthful as you possibly can be, as correct as you possibly can be.

-Talking about truth makes me think of how you’ve mentioned in past interviews how every fictional story is going to have autobiographical elements just like every memoir is probably going to have fictional elements. When you are writing fiction stories, is there a part of you that is aware that maybe part of it is autobiographical? Is there any sort of line that you try to toe between fiction and including autobiographical elements?

Not when I’m writing, but when I’m editing, yes, that’s a question that comes up. When I’m writing I’m just trying to get at this platonic ideal that has been formed a little bit above my abilities. When I’m editing I like to play with the preconceived ideas that the reader may have about me through the biographical details she may think she knows. It’s like a waltz—you believe that you know these things about me, so I’m going to make you see them in the text, and then I’m going to send you spinning out and coming back in. It’s pure play. And a lot of the details in the work that you probably believe are from my life are not.

-Sure.
It’s fun.

-In one interview I read with you, from Lucie Shelly with The Paris Review, you spoke in there a good amount about the idea of time and kind of our desire to control it as people and how fixated we are on it. Do you feel like any of your interest in writing is being able to create an artifact, whether it’s a book or a collection of short stories, that could outlive you?

This is interesting. I don’t know if, with climate change, if anything created right now will outlive the creator.

-Sure.

But what I do think that I’m doing when I’m writing fiction is that I’m creating a way to access time that we don’t normally get to access. We tend to live time as going forward like an arrow, because we are fallible human bodies that will disintegrate and decay. And in our memories we can go backwards, we can time travel backwards. Only in our imagination can we time travel forward into the future. With writing you are addressing a future reader who is reading the work of the past and sometimes shooting into the future, and you get to control the movement back and forth. I think fiction writing is the most beautiful thing. It’s time travel! It’s creating out of the work of history a false memory that you can now insert into another person’s brain. That’s kind of beautiful.

-Yeah, that’s kind of crazy.

It’s really nuts! We’re all time travelers when we read a novel.

-In the last five or ten years, your work and renown has really skyrocketed, with Fates and Furies being then-President Obama’s favorite book, among other exciting things. How do you feel about kind of writing more under the limelight now than five or 10 years ago? Is that something that’s exciting, is it something that’s frustrating, or is there really no difference?

What’s hilarious is that there’s this bifurcation between the author and the writer. The author is the one who gets the acclaim or none at all; the writer is the person who has to bang her head against words every single day. If I’m not on tour doing interviews like this, I’m not the author; I’m the writer, and the writer has to deal with her own daily failure.
- Sure.

So, I actually don’t think about that other stuff. It doesn’t enter into the storytelling (until at least the editing part) and it’s a very deliberate decision to split the writer and the author, because if you do allow other people’s opinions or ideas of what you are or who you are as a writer, that will kill you. That will kill the stories. It’s good to resist any externalized impression of what you should be doing as much as you possibly can and to only focus on the thing at hand.

- As far as now being an author and doing things like this and coming on tour and being someone who, in a sense, is a spokesperson for the literary community, is that a task that you enjoy having?

I don’t see myself as a spokesperson, but I love doing talks and meeting people. My life is really quiet. It’s rigidly rule-bound, and it’s very regimented. Doing things like this campus visit allows me to meet people and have conversations and see places like Indianapolis. I love it.

- That’s awesome. And as far as being a fiction writer, in one interview with the Harvard Gazette you talked about alienation as being a really rich and delightful place to be as a fiction writer. Could you explain that a little bit?

Sure. I feel like with other modes of storytelling you can write from the interior but in fiction you can’t, because you always have to be set apart in order to observe. I think that for a fiction writer to feel like a misfit, to feel like someone who’s not really at ease, to feel as though she’s not part of the in-crowd, that’s really essential.

You start to see with older writers or even writers who get a lot of renown that they begin to internalize fame, and they start writing the things they think people want. They stop being interesting. Always having a little bit of an oppositional nature, or feeling as though you’re observing from the outside is massively important. This is also why most writers of fiction were the nerdy geeky kids that nobody liked.

- Yeah.

Yeah. (Laughs.) Because they’ve had lifelong practice with it.

- Especially as far as you mentioned earlier, being an introvert, there’s just so much more natural seeing and observing of the world.
Yeah, you take a step back a lot when you’re an introvert. It’s super helpful.

- **How about as far as any of your readers who have read anything that you’ve written so far or even will write, is there any certain feeling or idea that you hope to leave readers with?**

When you think of your own work it’s like looking at the texture of a piece of fabric from close up; you can’t actually see the pattern that others see from far away. But maybe my largest impulse is that I want readers to love humanity. And to know that even though we’re all extraordinarily flawed, I want us to work for betterment, even if betterment may not happen.

- **Sure.**

It’s very idealistic in some ways. I just want us to be better than we are.

- **What do you think you of ten years ago would be most surprised about what present you is doing now?**

Oh my God, ten years ago, where was I 10 years ago? I’d be surprised I still live in Florida, to be perfectly honest. I had a 10-year contract with my husband to live in Florida, which we’re now twelve years into. But I would be really happy that I’m still writing and still feeling the daily failure of writing. I think all I’ve ever wanted was just to write until I die. That I’m still doing it feels pretty good.

- **So you’re currently on fellowship and you’re working—is it a captivity novel?**

Yes, a captivity narrative.

- **Captivity narrative, okay.**

Inspired by Mary Rowlandson—well, sort of. The funny thing is when you propose these fellowships, it’s a year and a half before they begin and I’m kind of done with the project already. But, I’m working on something else that I don’t even understand right now.

- **That’s exciting!**

And I’m letting myself fail, yes! There’s a lot of failure happening daily.
- For any readers who will look at this interview, is there any sort of advice you’d want to give aspiring writers?

Find the joy in what you’re doing. If you’re writing out of duty, that’s probably not going to be writing that’s going to fill you and come alive on its own. Find a way to love the work at hand.
something is wrong. i’ve never felt like this before. my friends are maybe a little drunk and are singing karaoke like it’s what god set them on this earth to do. everything is some shade of flashing purple. my one constant friend leaves me for the stage and i suddenly feel the need to be alone.

i walk quickly, not knowing where i’m going. i find an empty hallway.

i am confused. my body is seizing. it’s much too hard to breathe. my friend finds me and sits with me, grabs my hand and squeezes it whenever the shaking won’t stop.

i don’t know what’s happening, and i don’t know what to say to my friend who keeps asking me what is wrong. i don’t know what’s wrong. i don’t know. i wish i knew.

someone is cleaning the building and finds us like this. is she ok?

yes, says my friend. she’ll be ok.

i find it hard to walk. we try to leave, to go home, but i have to keep stopping. my body is not ready to give up its control over me.
PARKING GARAGE

paranoia. 2 am. i keep looking over my shoulder for something
that is not here. something inside me snaps. i break into a run, every
motion sensor light waking up to expose me. i grab the door open and
hurdle into the front seat of my car, hitting the lock over and over again
just to be sure.

no one is here.

i twist around, craning my neck, breathing fast and searching
the empty parking garage, searching the empty car.
no one is here.

my eyes fixate on the middle seat in the back, on the short
leather tab at the top. if you pull the tab, the seat folds down. there is a
hard, plastic backing behind it. if you remove the plastic backing, there
is a gaping dark hole. the trunk.

my breathing accelerates and turns into whimpers. there's a
gaping dark hole just behind that seat. it flies open. an arm reaches
out. a head comes through. a whole body squeezes out of the trunk and
launches at me.

no one is here.

the sound of my own crying is too loud, and it terrifies me.
i am paralyzed.

he's going to get me.

no one is here.

some rational part of my brain takes over, and i pop the trunk,
get out of the car:

my hands hesitate. with sudden resolution, i open the trunk.
no one is here.

i am terrified.

maybe he's in the car he's under the car he's hiding around the
corner he's watching from the security camera he's somewhere he's
somewhere i'm not safe he's somewhere
usually, i know what’s wrong. not this time. cold dread settles into my chest, seeping into every empty space.

i’m locking up the office. i do it every night. check the back door. lock it. hit the lights. make my way to the front, hitting three more lights. toss the keys onto my boss’s desk. grab my backpack. hit the two lights in the front and lock the front door. there’s nothing out of the ordinary. i’m alone, but i’m always alone.

spider’s legs creep into my chest and begin to tickle, then to squeeze. it’s a nervous, clawing feeling. i put a hand over my chest.

*breathe.*

i fill my lungs with air and empty them back out. i need to breathe the spider legs out. i count to four as i inhale, eight as i exhale. four, eight. four, eight.

the spider legs only squeeze closer. four. i’m supposed to be exhaling, but i don’t have enough air in my lungs yet. five. six. my lungs crave oxygen. i need to keep inhaling. i need to.

i suck in air through my mouth, one hand still pressed to my chest. not enough. the spider legs constrict and my heart pounds in my head. when i must exhale at last, it is only a fraction of an exhale before my brain notices there’s space in my lungs that must be filled.

*i need to breathe i need to breathe i need to breathe*

i begin to think that if someone could see me like this, they might think i’m drowning.

i swam to the bottom of a pool once, and it took me too long to come back up. this is a one-second memory, frozen in time. my lungs were screaming for air and my eyelids were stretched as widely as possible. i could see the surface waiting for me, just out of reach. every muscle in my body was strained to the surface, to oxygen.

i feel the same way now, stretched toward an invisible surface, eyes too wide, not enough air in my lungs.
sometimes, i wonder if i’m being overdramatic. maybe i’m faking it. maybe everything is fine. maybe i just let everything get out of control and if i really wanted to stop panicking, i would have no trouble.

my professor passes around papers and tells us we need to write down a timeline of our lives. nervousness builds as i watch the stack make its way towards me. when it reaches me, i grab one and devour it with my eyes.

i can do this.

i begin to feel calmer as i methodically draw my timeline. the professor asks for volunteers to read their timelines aloud. i don’t volunteer.

there is another activity. the papers come around again, and the nervousness that has not yet completely subsided builds once more. again, i look at the paper.

i can do this.

it happens one last time. every time the stack of papers comes around, my anxiety climbs a little higher than it had previously, like sisyphus determined to push his cursed rock up the hill but failing every time.

by the end of class, the spider-leg feeling is in my chest again and all i want is somewhere to cry it out alone. but there is nowhere to go to be alone. i wander down halls and staircases, ducking into rooms when i can until someone enters and drives me out.

that’s how i know i’m not faking it. i want to be alone, but the spider-legs feeling doesn’t care who is watching. it demands to come out.

there’s no air in my lungs again. i breathe and breathe and breathe until my head turns into a balloon and i’m sucking in helium. my feet start to prickle, then they’re just not there anymore. my knees and spine stop working. everything goes dark. i crumple facedown to the tile like a marionette whose strings have been cut.
RALEIGH, NC

i only know one person out of the eight or nine. this one person is pretending i’m not there, only talking to the girl seated on his other side. once, i try to tell him a story, and before i reach the end, he has turned his back to me again. i try to talk to the others, to get to know them, but they are all friends and talk about people that i don’t know. i begin to wish i had stayed alone in my room.

it starts in my left foot this time. i notice that my left leg is bouncing up and down. my heel doesn’t even hit the ground. i didn’t know my leg could bounce so quickly and so rhythmically.

it travels up into my knee. my whole leg tenses, releases, tenses.

it travels up to into my hips and stomach and lower back until my whole body is seizing.

if anyone notices, they don’t say anything. maybe they think i am only cold. part of me thinks i am only cold.

i go through the checklist of symptoms in my head:

accelerated heart rate: check.

shaking: check.

does feeling extremely anxious count as a symptom?

i excuse myself and hide in the bathroom. maybe if i can cry for a second, it will release the pent-up whatever this is. but this time, i can’t even cry. my body can only shudder. i want to cry. it feels like the moment just before you throw up, when all you want is to get it over with.

i can only ever remember the intensity.

i can never remember when it ends.
**Butler Writers** is an outreach of the Butler University English Department and MFA Creative Writing program that seeks to empower and amplify the voices of high school students in the Indianapolis community by connecting them with mentors and methods for self-expression.

Since its inception in 2011, this Jefferson Award-winning initiative has generated more than 1,800 mentee-mentor contact hours annually and served more than 1,500 unique students at our IPS partner schools.

For the first time, Manuscripts is proud to present a piece from a young poet in the Butler Writer’s after-school creative writing club. **Shaun'tae Swanson** is a sophomore at Shortridge High School. Her writing is influenced by what she witnesses and experiences as a female, as a teenager, as an African American, as a student, and as a human being.

*To learn more about the program, please visit butlerwriters.org.*
They criticize my words when I speak,
Because I don’t enunciate every word when I speak,
Because sometimes I speak too fast and slur my words
And my grammar is not the best they’ve heard.
I get too loud and ghetto,
Clap my hands and roll my neck.
So, ratchet to them I guess.
But it’s expected of me the typical black girl,
Talking like a typical black girl.
I show typical isn’t in my vocabulary yet—
That’s what they expect. Too big of a word?
Nah, just too vague.
They wonder how I can act so black even when I’m on stage.
This ain’t no act at all:
You can’t act an ethnicity or race.
Or should I say this isn’t an act
Because that’s the right way to say it
Perceived as the white way to say it.
But since when did right equate to white.
The white way ain’t never been the right way.
Quit listening to what they say:
We may not be picking cotton but we still are enslaved to their system.
Remove the shackles from our ankles and put them on our wrist.
Me being black and wearing a hoodie is me taking a risk.
They say me letting my mouth go off is the black woman thing,
something I can’t resist.
So is letting the gun go off a white officer thing,
something they can’t resist?
If my hands are handcuffed, sir, tell me how could I resist?
Me being black will get me beat blue and black.
Ain’t that about a bit—
Load your gun and fire in the blink of the eye. Without a flinch.
So when I speak and degrade white people, no, I don’t flinch.
You’ll get two for flinching:
Two shots that is,
Two black eyes,
Two fractured ribs,
A couple broken bones,
Two busted lips.
That’s enough to make me ball two of these black fists.
I refuse to be silenced,
Not when I’m still oppressed.
You can’t give me an inch of leeway and make me believe I’m free,
Or make me believe the white mind is greater than mine.
I’m not absentminded,
And you won’t make me absent.
And though my size is small, my voice is tall, And I’ve been doing big things. I won’t let you belittle me because I’m black.
I’m brown. My skin is nourished to life through melanin.
But somehow you summon its death due to melanin.
What if I told you I refuse to surrender, but somehow my hands are up?
Shoot, I have the right to remain silent,
But that’s something I won’t do.
Anything I say can and will be used against me in the court of law
If we ever make it that far
You know y’all get trigger happy
And end up being the only one to speak on the case
Making the real victim the suspect now that he’s in the grave,
But y’all criticize me when I speak—
At least I mean what I say.
But when a white man raises his white hand,
It doesn’t even have to be the right hand.
The jury hears truth in whatever he says.
So I’m in constant race because of my race.
So my voice I raise.
Not because I’m black, ghetto, or ratchet,
But because I am pissed off
That y’all don’t hear what I say
Unless it’s worth being criticized.
I lose my voice from yelling, but I still don’t stop. Is my voice a waste?
Or is it that I must yell so loud that you’ll hear me
Over the voice in your head that encourages you to reach for your waist?
Over the voice in your head that tells you
You are better than me because my skin matches dirt and yours is
the color of paste?
Is it that I talk too much, too fast, and too inconsistent for you to keep pace?
Or are the actual words what you distaste?
I’ve never been one to care—I guess it’s the blackness in me.
So criticize me if you please.
As a black woman, I’ve had to grow tough,
Had my heart on my rolled-up sleeves.
And despite who disagrees,
I’ll never limit speech.
Look what joy his last trick brings!
Suspended from the rafters,
Back and forth the Jester swings

Floating there as if on wings
Hear the children’s laughter
Look what joy his last trick brings!

Cheers of mirth and pleasure ring
At his show’s final chapter
Back and forth the Jester swings

A show unlike they’ve ever seen
The fool’s turned blue! He’ll be remembered forever after
Look what joy his last trick brings!

His feet twitch in a silly jig—to this the women sing
The men stomp their feet in a raucous chatter
Back and forth the Jester swings

From their seats, each person springs
To applaud this divine disaster
Look what joy his last trick brings!
Back and forth the Jester swings
Lucifer sipped his whiskey before waving a hand at Isaiah, the bartender, as he took up his rag and pints again. “No, no. I’m not going to drink alone,” the Devil said, patting the stool next to him. “Come and drink, come on.”

Isaiah shook his head. “I can’t drink while I’m on the job.”

The Hell lord held his glass up to his eye, the golden liquid glinting with the smoldering light of the Devil’s ember orange eyes. The black sclera in his eyes, where the whites should have been, seemed to magnify the fiery look. “Aren’t you the owner and sole employee here? You’re your own boss, my friend, with your own story,” said Lucifer, a sour look taking over his face. “Go on, make yourself a drink. I can wait. I’m good at that.”

The bartender cast a glance at the ghoul in the back, still unconscious from too many drinks and pieces of carrion. Honestly, Isaiah would need to remind his patrons that there was no outside food or drink in his bar, especially when it came to those that ate the dead. With no one else in the bar, mostly thanks to Lucifer walking in and the rest calmly rushing out, Isaiah knew he would not be called out for drinking on the job. Of course, if he clocked out early, he would not be on the job anymore.

“Look, you’re burning moonlight, Isaiah. Sun’ll be up soon and then it’ll be your bedtime, right? How about a drink before bed, huh?” Lucifer suggested.
Isaiah might have gotten into the routine of sleeping during the day, as most vampires did, but he could keep the shutters closed on his windows and stay awake through the daytime, too. Vampires were undead and did not need sleep, only food, and the smell of brimstone rolling off of Lucifer had made Isaiah’s throat run a little dry so he shrugged and set the rag and pint aside. A Bloody Mary was thrown together, tomato juice subbed for a cup of blood from the cooler under the bar. Isaiah could always restock from the local blood bank.

Coming around the bar, Isaiah sat beside the Devil, the vampire in a plain t-shirt and jeans with trendy sneakers, the Prince of Lies wearing a red-and-black flannel and white cargo shorts with sandals, despite the chill outside. Vampires and demons were not ones to catch colds, after all. Isaiah, though, did sit with his back to the bar because of the mirror he had placed behind the glass shelves stocked with liquor bottles. He could see any bar fights about to happen, but looking into a mirror and not seeing himself still unnerved him, even if his nerves were all dead.

“Cheers,” the Devil announced.

Their glasses touched, drinks were taken, and Isaiah asked, “So what brings you here?”

Lucifer swirled the whiskey around his cup. “I wanted a drink.”

“Everyone that comes here wants a drink,” Isaiah answered. He wanted to act like this was one of his regulars, to be as friendly with the Devil as he would be with a pipe bomb full of silver shrapnel. That is to say, he knew how to handle People™, but some might be hiding danger just under the surface and could go off if moved the wrong way. Isaiah was thankful vampires could not sweat.

The Devil grunted and took another drink. “My girlfriend dumped me.”

Isaiah choked on his Bloody Mary for a minute. It was the shock that caused it. Choking on a drink was a human reflex, one that he had still not gotten rid of, even after half a century. He gave a mighty cough and took an unnecessary deep breath. With his composure regained, Isaiah wondered if that display had offended Lucifer, but the Devil was patiently sipping on his whiskey, waiting for the vampire to respond.
“Well, I...” No, he was never “sorry” when other customers complained about this problem.

“That’s rough, buddy.... What happened?”

Lucifer took that as an invitation to throw his hands into the air and run them through his black-brown curly hair. “Fucking Dionysus happened! Lilith comes to me and says, ‘Hey, babe, you’ve been a little dry recently. D, though—’ she called him ‘D’ like they were already together!—‘D knows how to throw a party!”

“She actually said that?” Isaiah asked.

He wanted to give this Lilith credit for the innuendo with “dry,” and there was something to be said about her wanting “the D,” but maybe not out loud, because Isaiah liked his skin not burned from his body. Although, if any of Dionysus’s Maenads—those women that came into his bar to either a) sleep with his patrons, b) tear them limb from limb, or c) both—were any indication, Isaiah wondered if Lilith knew what she was getting into with dating the wine god.

“Pretty much,” Lucifer gargled, half-drinking as he spoke. He set his glass down, then added, “But that’s how it goes, huh? Guys like you and me have been getting the short end of the stick for centuries, millennia, even.”

“Guys like...?” Isaiah looked at his skin, which was ironically the brown of healthy tree bark, then at the coffee-colored skin on Lucifer. “Wait, you can’t mean—”

“Oh, but I do!” said the Devil, nodding. “We’re both victims, Isaiah. The Big Man has been trying to keep us down forever! Neither of us asked to be thrust into our situations, did we?”

Isaiah’s grip on his glass tightened.

“I did not ask to be a vampire, no.”

Lucifer barked out a laugh. “You know what I mean! Both of us, Isaiah, are in a system that was designed to keep us at or near the bottom! We’re both under the boot heel of the people at the top.”

“I ... think you’re mistaken.” Isaiah had no idea how to tell Lucifer that he was wrong without the Devil impaling Isaiah on his pitchfork, but maybe that was why the demon was prodding Isaiah.
“It’s the truth!” said the Prince of Lies.

Isaiah had not put enough vodka into his Bloody Mary for this, but he shot the rest of the drink back. Flicking residue from his upper lip, he put on a pained smile and gently set the glass on the countertop. “I’m listening …”

Lucifer looked thrilled, which could not have boded well. “Good, good. Alright, see, you know this society of yours is built around the abuse of people of color because way back, the Europeans decided to mess everything up for everyone. Colonial America pops up with their slavery, and they like to say it’s abolished, right? But no, it just evolved and became ingrained in the culture.”

“That’s a bit of a generalization,” Isaiah told him through clenched teeth.

“Maybe it is, but you know,” Lucifer said, even giving Isaiah a friendly nudge with the elbow. “One day, this city block might be bought up by some contractor who wants to build shiny new apartments, and then all the former tenants are kicked out of their homes in favor of the white people that can afford the new rents. The renovations are supposed to improve the neighborhood, right? Lower the crime rate? And if the people complain and resist and refuse to leave their homes, they send in the police because it’s illegal to take a stand all of the sudden.”

“You’re saying you’ve experienced gentrification before?” the vampire asked. Lucifer actually nodded, and Isaiah had to admit, his frustration got a splash of curiosity.

“The Big Man Upstairs is a real ass.” The Devil shook his head, skipping a refill and drinking straight from the whiskey bottle. “Hey everyone, here’s my son, he’s the greatest thing I have ever made. By the way, he’s also Me! So fuck the rest of you!”

Isaiah narrowed his gaze, gripping the edge of the bar in his hands. “So you were jealous because God liked Jesus more than you and you think that equates to—”

“No, no! Let me finish! I don’t have daddy issues,” Lucifer spat.

“Didn’t say you did,” Isaiah answered.
The Devil held the bottle tightly enough that his knuckles went to a lighter tone. “Just … just look. I was Lucifer Morningstar, an angel, and I disagreed with God once and he decided to chuck me into Hell!”

Isaiah crossed his arms accusingly.
“Didn’t you start a war in Heaven before he exiled you?”

The lights flickered, Lucifer’s eyes seeming a little brighter then. “Nothing wrong with a little revolution in the name of freedom, right? That’s what I was doing. I wanted the right to disagree with God! Without consequences.”

“What?” Isaiah chewed on his tongue to keep any more words from tumbling out of his mouth. Breaking a bottle over the Devil’s head would, obviously, have consequences, though Isaiah was considering doing it anyway. Not having consequences was a ridiculous idea. He had learned that the hard way when he was turned.

“You can disagree with someone without the violence!”

“You started a war,” Isaiah reasoned.

Lucifer snorted dismissively. “Then I became the scapegoat for all evil!” He took a long swig from the bottle, though the amount of whiskey within did not seem to be going down. “Guess God forgot to be all-forgiving, huh?”

Isaiah hopped down from the stool. “I’m still not seeing how you can say we’re similar.”

The Devil watched him move around the bar, where Isaiah made himself another Bloody Mary, this time with more vodka. The ghoul in the booth at the back—Isaiah had forgotten he was there—let out a deep sigh in his sleep. Lucifer’s attention went to the ghoul for a moment, his face expressionless and unreadable. The vampire came back around the bar, facing away from the mirror again.

“You don’t see it?” Lucifer asked, looking back at Isaiah earnestly.

“Not really,” Isaiah told him, taking a drink without a toast.

Lucifer scoffed, but Isaiah could not tell if he was actually offended or simply feigning it for dramatic effect.
“It’s all about perception, Isaiah. I was cast in a bad light from the start! I don’t have a choice in it, because people with more sway than myself decided Yeah, this guy’s evil. Period. I get no character development!”

Isaiah imagined wearing flannel and cargo shorts was a development for the Devil, though there was, among many other things, something bothering him. “Isn’t your whole deal tempting others? You try to get others to turn away from God, take up sin.”

“No, no! See? You sound like everybody else,” Lucifer insisted, jabbing a finger at Isaiah. “The writers got the Garden of Eden thing all wrong! I was trying to help, but God wanted there to be a story given to his audience, understand? Tell me that that doesn’t sound familiar.”

A pressure on Isaiah’s chin told him that he was biting down with his fangs, so he cracked his jaw and made to get up. “You’re painting with a big brush, in the hopes that I’ll identify with you. Elder vampires try to do that, complaining to me about our thirst for fresh human blood, but I don’t struggle with it like they do because I just go to the bank after dark,” he said, indicating his glass.

Isaiah did not like the wolf’s smile that Lucifer put on. The Devil said, “Come on, Isaiah, buddy, we all have a rough start. Vampires, especially. You guys are just so thirsty at the beginning.”

The bartender heard the glass cracking in his hand. He looked away from Lucifer, noticed that his hands were shaking. His brain, the only necrotic organ that still functioned despite the necrosis in vampires, wanted to pull him into a string of thoughts, but he refused to follow the rabbit. The ghoul snorted in its sleep again. Isaiah jumped to his feet, the glass shattering in his hand as his grip became too tight. He swore at the glass shards in his hand, the mess on the floor.

“I think we’re done here, Satan,” Isaiah hissed at the Devil.

Lucifer made a sound that was somewhere between a laugh and a goat’s bleating. “He busts out the S-word! Be careful with that, Isaiah. You might summon the wrong Devil.” He patted the stool next to him. “And no, we are not done. Sit. Listen.”

“I’ve heard enough.”

The pupils in Lucifer’s orange eyes turned to slits. “No, you haven’t. Sit. Listen. I can make it worth your time.”
Isaiah reached over the counter and grabbed his rag, kneeling to mop up the spilled drink. The imploding glass had thrown some Bloody Mary onto his shirt and jeans, too. “Shit.”

“So you’re interested in hearing more?”

“I’m not going to make a deal with the Devil! There’s a whole book on not doing that!”

Lucifer spread his arms as if looking for a hug. “Not even if I brought your wife back to life?”

Isaiah stopped, his muscles taut. He couldn’t accept anything Lucifer said. He couldn’t. There would be some trick. There always was with him. That’s what all the stories were saying, so of course Lucifer would say the opposite. He was the Devil. He lied. All lies and temptation. Isaiah’s wife was not in Hell, anyway. The Devil couldn’t possibly bring the dead down from Heaven.

“What are you thinking, Isaiah? You get your wife back and all you need to do is listen to my side of the story,” Lucifer told him. “She gets a second chance at life, you get a second chance at a marriage.”

Isaiah heard himself ask, “What’s the catch?”

“Just told you. Listen to my story and you get your wife. Simple.” Lucifer scrunched up his face. “Well, not that simple, because I’m bringing her back to life and you might have to sit here for a while more, but ... simple.” When Isaiah still hesitated, he added, “What’s the last image you want to have of your wife? Her passing peacefully, unless you turn her so you can both live happily forever, or her lying at your feet with her throat tor—”

“Enough!” Isaiah snapped. He stood and tossed the wet rag, wrapped around the glass shards, into the can behind the bar. Then the vampire met the Devil’s eyes. “My wife is brought back and all I have to do is listen?”

“I can bring your wife back to life, and the cost is you hearing my side of the story. Shake on it,” Lucifer said, extending his left hand.

Isaiah shook hands, but his attention was on how the Devil’s pupils went back to normal. That did not make the orange-on-black of his eyes any more normal, though. The vampire sat on the stool again and asked, “So what really happened in the Garden of Eden, Lucifer?”
“I’m so glad you asked, Isaiah. God gave Adam and Eve that one rule, and like good little mindless drones, they were going to follow it. I had a problem with that,” Lucifer explained, “because God had given them free will, too. They had no awareness of their environment, and that made Adam a big old stiff, which is probably why Lilith left him in the first place.” He stalled then, the way people do when they say something they might not have been intending to say, and it surprises them enough to go quiet.

In that silence, Isaiah said, “Adam had a wife before Eve?”

Lucifer nodded. “Yep, but again, he was no fun for Lilith, so she hopped out of there real quick. God made Eve, though, and that meant everything was going to be fine, as long as they didn’t touch the Tree of Knowledge. Poor Eve, man. I never meant for what came next, I swear. I just wanted her and Adam to remember that they did have free will.”

“But you knew that didn’t work out, right?”

“Really? It sounds like you were setting them up to fail,” Isaiah countered. “Are you sure it wasn’t to get some revenge on God for booting you from Heaven?”

“You sound like Milton. No, I wasn’t trying to ruin God’s newest creations because He decided I wasn’t good enough for Him!” He coughed, then acted like his throat was dry by taking a gulp from the bottle. “And again, God forgot about his whole deal of being all-forgiving! Adam and Eve apologized, and that prick Adam blamed Eve, too! If I’m responsible for a major fuck-up, at least give me some credit, damn.”

Isaiah scowled, thinking the story was not sounding so different so far. “So you’re proud of getting them kicked out of Eden?”

“No, but I’m flawed, Isaiah. I can shoulder blame, and I wanted to,” Lucifer assured him. “Problem was that God swooped in and says, ‘Yeah, Adam and Eve, I totally forgive you, but you’re not allowed in the Garden anymore, so leave and never come back. Also, Eve, childbirth is going to be immensely painful now, bye!’” The Devil shook his head, baring his impeccably white teeth in a snarl. “What an asshole.”

There was the flicker of a moment where Isaiah wanted to think that he could feel for the one speaking, except the one speaking was the fucking Devil. Sure, it sounded like Lucifer just wanted to be seen by others, including God no matter the number of times there was a denial of daddy issues. Isaiah could have gotten behind wanting to be seen. He could never check his own reflection, group photos with his regulars were pointless, and that was not even touching on how he had not felt night, he stuck to the shadows, because it wasn’t always the pale eyes
and elongated canines that scared normal people off. But again, Isaiah was not going to consider any sympathy for the Devil if the Devil was asking for it. He just wanted his wife back.

“Is that it?” Isaiah asked.

Lucifer rolled his eyes derisively. “If you want to go back to gentrification, I could complain about how the Underworld is getting pretty crowded. Dante thought he was helping organize Hell, but I got even less turf now thanks to him. The cold might be nice for Hel and her dead Vikings, but I am all about that fire and brimstone, you know?” Isaiah did not. “I think you have a lot of problems, Lucifer, and Lilith had little to do with them.”

“Yeah, but she went to Dionysus and just … what does that Greek have that I don’t?” He drained the bottle, dispelling whatever hoodoo had been making it bottomless in the first place. “Anyway, let’s get to it, with your wife and stuff.”

The Devil whipped the bottle at middle of the floor. As the glass exploded, it erupted into a pillar of flames that licked the ceiling. The flare forced his eyes shut. Isaiah felt the heat and reacted instinctively by throwing a hand up to shield his face. It was gone as soon as it had happened, the temperature in the room dropping back to lukewarm. Isaiah blinked, staring at the woman that had appeared in the middle of the room.

He recognized the earthy tone of her skin, and her face, the slight tilt of her head that always made her look as if she were angry at him, and that offset by the impish smile on her lips. Her chestnut hair fell to the left side of her head. She was shocked, and the smile was replaced by a small “o” in shape. Her eyes were wrong. They had been hazel before, with the littlest bit of green around the iris. Now those same eyes were pale, grey, and bloodshot, as if diseased. Isaiah pulled his gaze back, taking in the black dress she wore, the same one she had been buried in, only dirtier now. Dirt caked her fingernails.

Her head tilted to the other side, revealing the gaping neck wound.

Isaiah’s stomach churned. The Bloody Mary wanted to come back up. He rounded on the Devil, jumping from the stool into a predatory half-crouch, baring his fangs. “What did you do to my wife?!”
Lucifer held his hands up innocently. “Hey, don’t look at me. You said to bring your wife back to life.” He gestured to the body of Isaiah’s wife. “There she is.”

“She’s not speaking! You lied! She is not alive!” Isaiah wanted to dig his nails, which were growing into talons, into the Devil’s eyes.

“First of all, you never really specified what kind of second life you wanted me to bestow on her,” Lucifer corrected, leaning away from the vampire. “Being a zombie is undead, so she was brought back to life.” He stepped down from the stool as Isaiah advanced towards him. “Second, you tore out her vocal cords, so—”

He did not get a chance to finish the sentence, because Isaiah slashed at him, cutting the sleeve of the Devil’s flannel, drawing black blood from shallow cuts on the arm. Isaiah decided he hated flannel now, because of Lucifer and his liar’s grin. “Fix her!”

Lucifer scoffed. “I have done as you ask, sir.”

“That’s not my wife!”

“Hey, it’s not necrophilia if you’re both ...” Lucifer trailed off, his eyes going past Isaiah. “Oh, whoops. Forgot about that guy.”

“What are you—”-a snarl and a crash turned Isaiah back around as he watched the ghoul from the back booth, now awake and hungry, tackling the zombified shell of his wife to the ground. Her head made a noise Isaiah did not want to describe as it collided with the floor. “No, no! Get off of her!”

Isaiah made to pounce on the ghoul, but a fireball whistled past him and struck the ghoul first. Its rags went up moments before its body burst into flames, too. It shrieked and fell on top his wife’s body. The little inferno engulfed both of them. Isaiah closed the gap between him and the fire. His hand burned as he reached for his wife. The heat might have made him sweat, had he still been able. He could see her face through the fire. It was the same one she had made half a century ago, light fading from the betrayed look in her eyes as she stared up at him, her neck open because he could not save her from his own mistake.

The flames whipped up for a brief moment before dispersing, the two bodies collapsing into an ashy pile. Isaiah could not tell where his wife’s ashes ended and the ghoul’s began. He pressed his burned hand into them anyway, as if he would find her whole underneath the pile, feel a heartbeat from her again. There was nothing but ash.
“That hellfire,” Lucifer said nonchalantly, drawing Isaiah’s glare to him, “works quick. Sorry your wife was too close, Isaiah. To have her back and then ...” His cheeks deflated as he blew air from puffed lips, the sound like a fire catching. “That’s rough, buddy.”

Isaiah was across the room in a heartbeat, ramming his forearm into the Devil’s throat. Lucifer half-laughed, half-choked as he was pushed back against the bar. Isaiah was taller than him, but this was the Devil. Isaiah’s hand reared back, talons poised to strike. The wings of a giant vulture sprouted from Lucifer’s back. The vampire hesitated. The wings beat once and tossed him back, into the pile on the floor.

The ash flew into the air in a cloud. Some of it stuck to the wet spots on his clothes, to the burned flesh of his hand, his hair. Isaiah held out his hands, letting some of it land in his palms, even if he could not tell which of the two he was holding.

“Oh, look, you’re crying, ha!” the Devil told him, covering his smile with a hand. That did not stop the joy from reaching his smoldering eyes. Isaiah wiped at his face, brushing ash across his cheeks on accident, but the Devil was right, he was crying. The tears were bloody, of course, because there were few other bodily fluids in him aside from blood. “Go to ...” He stopped, knowing telling the Devil to go to Hell would probably make Lucifer laugh again. “Just fuck off.”

“You seem upset.”

The vampire hissed and stared into those burning charcoal eyes.

“I wanted my wife back!”

Lucifer shrugged. “And you got her. For about ten seconds, but you also never said how long you wanted her to come back to life.”

“That was not a life,” Isaiah snarled, his hands shaking. “I wanted to be with her again!”

The smile on the Devil’s face broadened. “Well, why didn’t you say that the first time, Isaiah?”

Then he snapped his fingers towards the front of the room. Isaiah watched as the front door and the shutters on the windows popped open.

Morning sunlight flooded the bar.
Isaiah felt the sun on his skin for the first time in half a century.

And it burned.
The backward toss of a sweaty brow
Under dim lamplight
A puckered pout kisses B flats

Bebops and back-beats
Heroin and heroines
Soul sliiiiiiiiding down the reed

Catapults
Out of the brass
And moans through a haze of Camel Lites

Seeps under the window
And crawls along a sewer rat’s spine.
Inside, there’s

Grit in the keys and dust in the mufflers,
The only sort of dirt such evening gowns would swirl through,
An audible cocktail straw.

The bass smooth as jack
—Interlude—of ice cubes
And the clink of broken meter; breathy sips

Cheers to the melodic melt of lipstick
Glazing a crisp white collar
From the smirking, to the smoldering, dancer

Rasp and rhythm
Wheezes and whispers
Secrets escape his saxophone
Introducing the phenomenon of stressed ascendant bold and fantastic femmes.

Seeking promiscuous revolution without limits.

Fight to the death!
THE PATRON SAINT OF
GIRLS GETTING GROPED

Josie Levin

Poetry Contest - Finalist

Vengeance is a cold wind. She slips her way below my bones, where I need her vindication most.

Conversely, her rage is on high burning in the patronage of teen girls in pleated mini skirts knowing clothes don’t matter near as much as wandering hands finding their way below skin—my jeans, anyway

Well-manicured and bitten-off nails alike have pressed pads of fingers together enough times to know that Vengeance is the only spirit listening

When a hand passes through Benediction, Prayer, and Plea alike, girls who were asking for it anyway know that no god will remove a man’s grip from their legs, thighs, hips, chests, necks, wrists—

Snap

Like a branch from an adorned tree wouldn’t be snapped up in the jaws of a wolf? Get real.

Girls, the gods won’t fight monsters on your behalf. What do you think you were sent to his lair for?
Let’s face it ladies: no god will stop his scabbing skin from imbedding in yours.
What warrior could stand against him?
When he wears their own faces?
Don’t you see it, girls? He is their idol, just a statue of what they pray for
And the gods? Well, they must be listening to someone.

Remove your offerings from the altars of weak gods.
Consume the bones of the strong ox, yourself.
To pray to Vengeance is to swallow the blessing and spit it in your hunter’s face.
When did you know you were done with me?
5:42 p.m., Hendricks Dormitory, Room 306D

Kai was laughing. Again.

_Dammit, dammit, dammit_, I thought, rapping my knuckles once for each _dammit_ against the decades-old dorm desk of which I have the, ah, incredible fortune of owning for the next eight months. His laughter was not a good sign—it was supposed to be a _story_, not a freaking comedy. Kai, wide shoulders beneath his off-white Stevenson Point tee betraying his ex-football player build, was hunched over on his bed, squinting down at the manuscript I had written for my prose class.

_“Bungle juice?”_ he queried, his eyes crinkled in laughter. _“You think people at parties drink _bungle_ juice?”_

Blood rushed to my face. _Didn’t Craig say something about getting smashed off _bungle_ juice?_

_“Uh, yeah,”_ I began. _“Like, when you go to a party and there’s a pitcher of, you know, bungle…”_ My voice trailed off as Kai stifled more laughter.

_“Jungle juice, homie. ¿Como una selva?”_
Like a jungle...yeah, jungle juice made a whole lot more sense than bungle juice. You know, alliteration and whatnot. Damn, and this guy thinks he’s hot shit because he spent last May partying—whoops, studying—in the D.R. and accidentally picked up some Spanish. I rolled my eyes.

“Yeah, yeah. I get it.”

“Look bro,” Kai began, handing me back my story, “It’s good shit. It is. But you gotta sound like you have some semblance of knowing what you’re writing about. And you, good sir, know squat about parties.”

I can’t say he’s wrong. As my illustrious career at Stevenson is heading into its third year, I’ve only been to two parties. Okay, okay, the first one was in the Union, meaning we got fruit juice instead of jungle crap and played Wii ping-pong instead of beer pong, and the second one was more of a pity invite from a girl in my psych class because I was the only one in our research group not going, but you get the point. Parties weren’t quite my move.

I inhaled hugely, puffing my cheeks out, then slowly blew air out a thimble-sized hole in my pursed lips. “Yeah, you’re right. Tienes razón.”

“Alright, here’s the shebang, Davíd,” he started, proudly emphasizing the second syllable because, yes, spend a month in a Spanish-speaking country and you get so cultured you pronounce your Mexican friend’s name just like his madre does, “Trent’s having a thing. Tonight. You know, back to school kind of get together. Nothing huge, but probably a bit louder than your planned Friday night flipping pages of a book—hey, hey, let’s be honest here,” he cut in as I opened my mouth to defend myself. “But it’ll be good. You know, music. Bungle juice. Females. Lemme talk to him and I’m sure you can swing by.”

“I mean, I don’t wanna crash his thing, like—”

“Davíd, you wanna write this story or you wanna write this story? You come, you see what’s it like, you get a little buzzed, or a lot, you go home. Easy as calculus.”

“No, I mean, whatever. Fine.” At this, Kai pumped his fist in the air like the Packers just scored a touchdown. “And calc’s not easy, you asshat. You’re just smart.”

Unfortunately, even this protest couldn’t wipe the smile off his face. He was getting his loser friend to a party, and he was happy as a clam.
8:51 p.m., Hendricks Dormitory, Room 306D

I looked at myself in the mirror. Yep, there I was. Dark hair, light brown skin, eyes, nose, mouth, etc. I started scrubbing my teeth courtesy of Walmart’s cheapest toothpaste, trying to rid myself of burrito breath, when I heard Kai’s footfalls come out of our double towards the bathroom.

“Davíd!” he shrieked with delight, sounding exactly like people do when they pretend to be someone’s mom. “¿Estás lista, m’hijo?”

I groaned through the foam of my minty saliva. “The Spanish is out of hand. Besides, it’s listo, not lista. I’m a dude, if you didn’t know. But yeah, I’m almost ready. Give me a sec.” I tried spitting out my mouth full of toothpaste for emphasis. Inexplicably, a strand of teal paste dribbled down my chin, dropping onto my black tee before I could stop it.

Kai, who must’ve been feeling kind, stifled any kind of laugh. “Shoot, listo, not lista. You right. That adjective agreement stuff always trips me up. But c’mon, we gotta run over to Anna’s before we head over.”

After rinsing and sliding my toothbrush back into its holder, I turned to him. “Anna’s? I thought this was Trent’s thing?”

“Pregaming, hijo. Perhaps the most important part of the night!”

Even I knew what pregaming was, so I didn’t have to ask. But I did have to put forth a mild protest: “Dude, you said this was a thing with Trent. You didn’t tell me we were gonna tour the dorms before going over.”

“Chill, man, it’s just one stop. And besides, An-na.” (Read: “Come on man, you know I like her, and what better way to get her to like me back than hanging out and drinking together?”)

“Alright, alright, we’ll go pregame at An-na’s,” I affirmed, emphasizing her name in the same way he did. (Read: “I don’t really want to go, but I guess we can. Besides, you’re kind of the reason that I’m going to this in the first place so I can’t really leave you.”)

“Sweet,” Kai grinned. “You know, I am kind of the reason you’re going in the first place.”

Dang, this guy’s good. “Yeah, yeah, well. You know,” I said, snagging my pocket notebook, lifting it up for him to see before stuffing it into the pocket of my jeans. “For the sake of the story.”

Kai eyed me. “You’re not actually planning to be writing at this party, are you?”
“I mean, if I’m going to be writing a good—” Kai cut me off.

“Bro. It’s a party, not study tables.”

My face flushed as I fumbled in my backpack for my mini pen, perfectly sized for the notebook. “Look,” I started, finding my pen at the bottom of my bag and snapping it. “This isn’t my thing, it’s your thing. You go for Anna, I go for the story, ok?” I made a show of re-pulling out my notebook, clipping the pen on, and shoving it back in my pocket.

“I don’t know if I’ve heard homework as the reason someone goes to a party, but hey,” Kai shrugged. “If it gets you out of the house. By the way, you planning to head there as toothpaste-shirt guy or you gonna change?”

“Right, right. Uh, forgot about that. Gimme two.” I head into my room, combing through my t-shirt drawer until finding a nondescript blue tee. It’d have to do.

10:17 p.m., 4422 Westford Pl. (living room, kitchen)

Gingerly pushing open a well-worn door, our crew of five—Kai, Anna and two of her friends, and me—joined what felt like 500 people, though may have been closer to 50. Music pumped through a sound system, generic rap with only expletives and innuendos audible. Something about horse riding, but it sounded like the horse was actually a—never mind. Thankfully, my train of thought was interrupted by flannel-wearing dude looking like he’d been drinking since last night,shouldering me accidentally as he stumbled by and mumbling an apology.

I tried to take it all in. In front of me was a mass of people, their red cups sloshing dark liquid, swaying vaguely in tune to the music. To my right, across from mismatched couches, a 30-some inch TV playing a college football had a few guys huddled around, beers clutched in their hands.

Kai and the girls seemed pulled by some magnetic force towards the kitchen, so I followed dumbly just as I had at Anna’s pregame, edging past too-warm bodies, the scent of the room thick like air before a thunderstorm, the whole place a heavy mix of booze, perfume, and gym locker room.

“You taking notes, m’hijo?” Kai shouted to me over the bass, grinning.
My face burned, but I shouted back. “Absolutely. Number one—Kai is an asshat.”

“What?” he cried.

“I said you’re an asshat!” I bellowed.

Kai flipped me off cheerily and Anna giggled as we scooted around a lively beer pong game and crossed into the kitchen which, while still swarming with people, allowed me to feel like I would at least have the room to lean over and tie my shoe, if need be. On a card table was an enormous salad bowl filled with what I could only guess was jungle juice.

“Kai, what is up, my bro?” I looked up to see a guy from my Brit lit class pulling Kai into a complicated man handshake, lots of hand smacking culminating with a chest bump. “You guys want something to drink?” he asked our group, referencing towards the almost neon-blue liquid in the bowl and beginning to ladle out the stuff as they assented.

I mumbled some sort of yes to his offer as well, pretending he hadn’t ignored me but was actually still planning to greet me in some sort of elaborate fashion. Here I am, this dude sloshing blue liquid into these hallowed red cups, this pinnacle of our very existence, the college Mecca, complete! Jungle juice! Sure, I was still left unacknowledged, but when you’re friends with someone you don’t actually have to say hi, right, it’s just understood?

Realizing I had kind of spaced out, I looked up to see Kai and the others heading back towards the main room and him shouting, “You coming?”

I felt bad for already following them around the last hour at Anna’s, so I pushed my hand slightly forward in the air like I was shooting a basketball with terrible form, as if to say, you kids go on ahead and have your fun without me, now.

“So, uh, how you been, man?” I asked the Brit-lit-classmate-turned-jungle-juice-server guy, sipping from my cup. The stuff was almost sickly sweet, but when I swallowed it, it burned, and I coughed. I quickly tried to stop myself from coughing, which only made me need to hack more.

After the world’s longest twenty seconds I looked up to see him, unimpressed. “So yeah, you’ve been doing ok?” I asked hopefully.
“Yeah. Yeah, not too bad,” he said, not unkindly, but with his eyes already searching for the nearest exit as if I were an encroaching fire. His teeth were blue from the drink. “Listen, I gotta go catch up with a buddy, but I’ll see you around.” He shot out like a rocket, leaving me alone in the midst of blue-toothed, drunken strangers.

11:32 p.m., 4422 Westford Place (beer pong table)

I checked my phone again. Not even midnight. I felt like I had been here for hours, sipping on blue rocket fuel and incinerating my throat. I was posted up in a corner chair by the beer pong, far enough out of the way that I only occasionally got hit with the sticky, off-white ball.

At parties, I quickly found out, like anywhere in the world, it is very easy to become invisible. If you were relatively stationary, spoke little, and looked down most of the time, bam! No one would speak to you.

I was ready to leave—beyond ready, really. But I didn’t want to be that guy, dipping out before midnight. But I pretty much had what I needed. (Another perk of being invisible, no one minds much if you pull out a pocket-sized notebook and take notes. Mine read: jungle juice - radioactive?? sweet but super strong. beer pong = necessary evil. making out couples plentiful. drunk people love singing?)

Nothing too earth-shattering, I realize, but just being here was good. I think I had enough of a handle on the rules of beer pong to write a passable beer pong scene now, too. Looking back, my party scene had been a little dopey, come to think of it.

Cheering erupted from the other end of the table, and Kai and Anna were going wild as Anna’s friend, on the side of the table near me, slurped down beer from another cup before setting it aside. Her partner took the ball and tossed it. It clinked ineffectively off the side of one cup before Kai snagged it.

“Dávíd!” he shouted, giddy with the combination of alcohol and proximity to Anna. “This one’s for you, buddy!” He chucked the ball hard against the wall to his right. It bounced off, hit the table once, and plopped perfectly in the remaining cup, at which point shrieks of joy erupted.

“HE’S DONE IT! HE’S DONE IT!” some rando shouted, thumping him on the back. The girl next to me, after shrieking in delight, lunged
towards the table in preparation for the next game, bumping a crop-topped girl’s back in the process and dropping her solo cup directly onto the right leg of yours truly. Blue exploded in all directions, and I stood up quickly, trying to stop the stuff from pooling, but it was too late. My jeans and, more importantly, my notebook were soaked. I pulled it out of my pocket, ignoring her apologies as someone sober enough to walk in a straight line rushed to the kitchen to find paper towels.

Kai broke himself away from his beer pong jubilation long enough to come over. “Did you see that, *hijo*? Did you see that!” he roared, grinning. Then, seeing me dripping, added, “Man, you were in the splash zone!”

“I’m out. She soaked me.”

“No, shoot, you sure? It’s jeans, no one will notice.”

I looked down at my jeans soaked to a dark blue, soggy notebook in one hand. “Yeah man, I’m—”

“Take these,” someone said, stuffing paper towels into my hand. “Lauren, dang it, Lauren, sit here,” the voice continued in the same breath, a hand deftly wiping the seat dry before half helping, half pushing the girl who spilled on me into the seat. “She had too much to drink. A-gain. Just like last week.” Behind glasses, I saw her rolling her eyes, a movement that looked instinctual.

“Well, uh, thanks for the paper towels,” I said, dabbing my pants the best I could.

“No problem,” she responded distractedly, using the remaining paper towels to dry the aforementioned Lauren, who was still laughing and apologizing. “Hey, you say you were leaving? I gotta get her home.”

Thoughts of being in my extra-long twin bed in 10 minutes, drifting mercifully to sleep after a long, weird night had flooded my mind, but now I saw that dream start to blink out like a weird PowerPoint animation.

“Yeah, I was about to head out.”

“Help bring her home?” the girl acting as Lauren’s caretaker said. My silence spoke for the fact that I didn’t want to, but I felt her eyes on me and she quickly filled in the silence. “Last time I tried to bring her myself I couldn’t get her to her room fast enough and she peed all over her—”
“I did not!” Lauren interrupted, her voice fogged by jungle juice. “Did not do that, you think I did that?” She turned to me, giggling again.

Ignoring Lauren, who appeared incapable of conversation, I looked to the girl who had asked me to help. “Yeah, sure.”

I look back to Kai to confer with him that I was, in fact, heading out, but he had already been sucked back towards Anna. Soaked notebook in one hand, I stood to head out.

•

12:36 a.m., Elmsen Dormitory Room 229A

I adapted quickly to my new role as co-caretaker of Lauren. The girl I was helping, whose name I learned was Mary, asked I at least stay for an hour or so because she was kind of drunk, too, and was worried she’d fall asleep on Lauren. “Can’t have her dying, you know, her parents would kill me,” she’d said.

Mary seemed pretty cool in a refreshing kind of way. On one hand, she was brusque with Lauren, near-pulling her up the stairs when apparently I wasn’t helping her up fast enough. On the other hand, she was looking after Lauren, who was now snoring quietly, and demanded I take some cookies for being nice enough to help.

“These are delicious, by the way,” I told her, reaching into the Tupperware to take out another chocolate chip. “I know that, David, otherwise I wouldn’t have made them.” She rolled her eyes and laughed, but not unkindly.

I sunk back into their futon, quietly munching on a cookie. My jeans were still wet, but I was getting kind of used to it at this point. Things could be worse, I guess. Mary sat cross-legged beside me, spacing out, then suddenly reached across me, brushing my arm as she snagged my still-wet notebook, which I had set beside me after trying in vain to fan out the pages.

“What’s this for, by the way?”

“Those are just some notes,” I said vaguely, touching my arm, not particularly pleased she just took my stuff without asking. I wasn’t quite in the mood to explain that I took notes on a party for my prose class.
“Ah. Notes. It’s pretty soaked but, let’s see here.” She thumbed
gingerly through the wet pages, the ink runny but not altogether illeg-
ible. “Jungle juice…Making out couples plentiful.” She pursed her lips,
raising her eyes and looked up at me expectantly. “Just some…notes for
class?” Her eyes twinkled.

“Okay yeah, that probably looks weird, but it’s for a story.” Here
I go, announcing to this poor girl my weird party plans. “Like, for a
class. I had written a party scene that was just a mess, so my roommate
told me I should go with him so I could figure out how to write a better
scene.”

“Did he suggest taking notes?” she asked, a ghost of a smile on
her face.

“No,” I laughed despite myself. “No, I can’t say he was a fan of
me bringing the notebook.”

Mary seemed content with that, and set the notebook down be-
tween us, then slouched down into the futon and put her feet up mini
ottoman. “So, did it help?”

“Did what help?”

“Going to the party. With the story, I mean.”

Oh. Right. “Yeah, I mean, I think so. I don’t really go to them
very often, so it was good to get experience, I guess?”

She laughed quietly, saw me shrinking away, and spoke. “No,
no, sorry. I didn’t mean to be laughing at you. It’s just, people go to par-
ties for the dumbest reasons, you know?”

“Uh, thanks.”

“No, not you. Well, not you specifically.” We laughed, together this time,
and Lauren offered a well-timed snore. “Just like, you went to write
a book, Lauren went to get drunk, I mean half the people there were
probably there just because they thought they had to be there.”

“Yeah, I think you might be onto something.” I thought for a
second. “And where do you fit into that whole spectrum?”

She sighed at that. “There was this guy. He told me he was going
and that I should come by, so of course Lauren was up for it, and then
this douche doesn’t even show up.”

I gave a series of intelligent responses, “Oh, yeah. Huh,” before
finishing it off: “Well, I’m sorry about that.”
"Yeah, I dunno. It’s probably for the best. I mean, I’d rather babysit Lauren and have some weird guy eat all my cookies anyways."

It was at this point I realized that I had been on autopilot, as I finished chewing the last bite of another gloriously soft chocolate chip cookie. “Shoot, I’ve eaten like six of these.”

“Eight, actually,” Mary said, helpfully. I was mortified. “It’s fine, really. They’re better fresh anyways.” She pulled another out of the Tupperware, broke it in half, and handed it over. “Here.”

“I really can’t say no to these,” I said, accepting the cookie half and taking a bite.

“Yeah,” she giggled. “I gathered that after the fourth or fifth one.” We ate in a silence that wasn’t quite uncomfortable. It could have been a worse night. I mean, the party was weird and sweaty, my notebook was ruined, and my sleep cycle (I glanced at my watch—12:47 a.m.) was surely thrown off, but the cookies were good and Mary, honestly, was kind of cute.

At a certain point, I realized I had dozed off, but woke up really needing to pee. I gingerly poked Mary, who had nodded off, too. “Can I use your guys’ bathroom?”

She nodded. “Yeah, shoot. I fell asleep. It’s right over there.” She pointed to the right of their entrance and got up to go to check on Lauren, who was still snoring contentedly by my standards, as I went to pee. As I came back, wiping my hands dry on my damp jeans, I tried and failed to stifle a huge yawn and asked, “Is it cool if I head back? She seems, uh, pretty alive, by my standards.”

Mary laughed, her eyes crinkling up in a smile. “Go for it. And hey—thanks for helping out.”

“No problem. Anytime you need someone to pull your drunk friend up the stairs, just let me know,” I said, heading towards the door, still bleary from sleep. Clever, right?

“You could hardly get her up the first step,” she retorted. “Hold it, your notebook.”

I turned towards the futon to get it, but she already had it held out for me.

“Thanks.”
“Thanks yourself. And sorry about the notebook, anyway.” It was still pretty damp, but she had clipped the pen back on for me which was nice, I guess. She unlocked the door, pulling it open.

“Okay, well, have a good night.”
I stepped out into the dorm hallway.

“You too David, seeya.”

Wet notebook in hand and the remnants of chocolate chip cookies in my molars, I left Elmsen and crossed the quad to get to back to Hendricks. The night had an early fall crispness to it, chilly but not unpleasantly so. Across the way, I saw three girls laughing, shoes clacking in rhythm on the sidewalk, dressed like they were going to a party. Wait...I checked my watch—1:22 a.m. They weren't going, they were leaving. Maybe their bloodstream was tinged blue with jungle juice, too, which reminds me I've got to tweak my party scene. Damn. I couldn't sleep yet, I still had work to do.

•

9:47 a.m., Hendricks Dormitory, Room 306D

The story was done. Finally.

Feeling surprisingly good for not having got my 8-hour quota of sleep and now having finished my short story, I was feeling pretty happy with myself.

“Ka-i! Breakfast is ready!” I shouted gleefully, in a horrendous and vaguely motherly soprano. Dutifully, Kai appeared, shirtless and with uncombed hair, but there all the same. I'll admit, the man came pretty fast considering, A) it was Saturday, B) he was slightly hungover, and C) breakfast was Pop-Tarts.

“So, how'd things end up last night?” I asked, sliding a pack of Pop-Tarts over to him.

He grinned. “Good man, it was a fun time.”

“So, you and Anna...” I asked, letting my voice trail off.

“I mean, she seemed to have a pretty good time,” Kai said through Pop-Tart crumbs. “But you know, I don’t really like to rush these things.”
“Claro que sí, I gotcha man.” I smiled.

“By the way, why am I up right now? It’s like 10 a.m. on a weekend.” “I thought you’d never ask,” I said jubilantly, reaching into my backpack. “This.” I handed over my finished short story, triumphant.

“Hey, m’hijo, there we go!” Kai raised his knuckles for a fist bump. “Well, grab some Pop-Tarts, stay a while, lemme read this sucker.” “Can’t do that, my man. Not today,” I said, standing up from the table, grin on my face.

Kai looked up, mid-bite. “And why’s that?”

“Because of this.” I pulled out my now only damp notebook from my pocket, flipping to the back of the notebook, where on the cardboard backing, a hasty scrawl in blue pen read, “Because you forgot to ask for it—Mary,” with a phone number and smiley next to her name. A smiley! “Who’s Mary?” Kai asked, blinking with sleepy eyes.

I grinned. “I’ll tell you after breakfast, man! Enjoy your Pop-Tarts!” Before he could respond, I winked at him, snagging the remaining copy of my story before heading out of our room and the front doors of Hendricks into the squinting morning sun.

•

9:58 a.m., Reggae Cafe

I was sitting maybe halfway to the back wall of the cafe, facing the entrance so I could see Mary when she came in. Feeling like I needed something to do with my hands, I thumbed through my short story. Mary would think it was lame, maybe, that I was bringing the story to show her. But, if her figuring out I went to a party just to take notes on parties didn’t make her realize I was at least 50% lame, that was kind of her bad.

Looking up from my story, I saw her open the door and waved her over. Last night’s jungle juice and chocolate chip cookie-tinged assessment was confirmed—she was cute. I smiled, but then tried not to. This resulted in my face looking like I was either constipated or suffering from appendicitis, or both, as she sat down across from me. Thankfully, she seemed not to mind, and immediately dove into her mental dilemma regarding the merits of an omelet versus chocolate chip pancakes. After I assured her there was perhaps no order more noble than chocolate chip pancakes, we both ordered and she nodded at my papers on the table.
“Wait! Is that your short story?” she asked, sounding excited.

I grinned.
“Yeah, I thought I’d bring it if you wanted to check it out.”

“Of course! My sister writes stuff all the time and I love reading it.” I slid the paper across to her, and she picked it up, read for a second, and set it back down. “Wait a second. We should read it together, I wanna be able to point out the parts I like.”

She stood up, scooted next to me in the booth, and, our shoulders touching, we began to read together:

The gas station dude was giving me a weird look, like he was in on a secret he couldn’t wait to tell me. Frankly, I was just hoping to buy my Coke in peace, but he chats me up like he’s been waiting for this conversation for years.

“How ya doin’ this afternoon?”

“Good, thanks. Just enjoying the weekend.”

“Any big plans for the night?” he asked, ask I handed over my credit card.
“I may go out with some buddies tonight, but I’m not sure yet.”
His eyes twinkled a little bit as he handed my card back. I was itching for the receipt to print.
“Going out, huh? That sounds like a fun time to me.”

“Well, it’s not really my thing.” I shrugged. “We’ll see.”

The receipt came out, mind-bogglingly slowly. He tore it off but, still holding it in his hand, leveled his gaze and spoke. “Hey, you go on and have a good time, alright? Nights like that are great.” He handed over the receipt, and I smiled at him. He continued, so earnestly I half-believed him, “Really! Trust me, you never know who you might meet.”
clinging onto cardstock
fifty soldiers stand at attention.

no slip grip,
slide-proof,
comfort glide tip,
metals of honor.

the corps is at war:
pin down a bump
secure a lock
stay amid strands,
camouflaged.

but rigidity does not last,
tired arms.
GPS lost signal.
the soldiers are gone.
Hello there!

Have you read the whole of this year’s fantastic issue? Good! I hope you enjoyed it. Although this volume is smaller than previous years, it does not necessarily hold less substance; the works here have just as much punch as a full-length novel, and may become some of your favorites. Some are silly, and others serious. Some chronicle the lives of just one plucky protagonist, and others bring messages that echo across an entire world. However these works reach you, I hope you can feel the power that went into every page of this magazine - from the authors, poets, artists, and Manuscripts execs alike. I am simply the designer that brought these pages together, but had a hell of a (stressful) fun time doing it.

Some people might ask; why do we need literary mags like this one? Why is it necessary to collect and publish these kinds of things year after year? What is this collection of beautiful art doing at my pharmacy and business-biased university?

I’ll ask you this in return; what do people remember years down the line, when their present becomes the past? How do we catalogue the most important events in history? How do stories and experiences get passed down from one generation to the next? Art. Poetry, drawings, prose, music, dance…name any period in history, from any place in the world, and I’m sure you can remember some form of art from that time.

This magazine might not be a painting in one of the world’s most renowned museums, or a sought-after text fished out of an ancient tomb, but that doesn’t mean it can’t be a part of history. The way that we archive our past is changing. You may think that there isn’t anything too
remarkable about the time that we live in compared to what you learned about in your high school history class, but there is. Look around you—things that the world needs to see and remember take place every day. There’s always something world-changing going on. It might be in our political climate, advancements in technology, activism, news, hometowns, universities, even our own backyards.

And you can already guess how our feelings about these things will be expressed. It’s already been done, is being done, and will be done in the future. Art is the echo of what truly makes us human, from these stories and poems describing our deepest, most visceral emotions, to paintings and photographs trying to capture and make sense of where we are in the universe. I’m getting a bit long-winded, but I think I’ve made my point about why a tiny little university magazine is so special.

This year’s magazine featured a printmaking theme - much to my delight. I’ve created a handful of little glyphs, personalized for each piece in the magazine. Did you find them all? I created each one by hand, then stamped it onto paper, and placed it digitally. The images on the cover, interview panel, and Butler Writer’s panel are handmade prints as well, some of them being used at this year’s Literatura festival. Printmaking is an ancient, exciting art, and although I jump around between a lot of mediums, I always love to come back to this one. There is something grounding about it, and I hope you feel inspired to try it yourself.

It’s about time for me to go...I’ve been the Design Chair on Manuscripts for a good three years now. I’m saying goodbye along with Bryan Furuness, our knowledgeable and quirky faculty advisor. It has been one of the best art-based jobs I have ever had, and is where I have made some wonderful friends and produced some of my best work. I’ve been on staff alongside some of Butler’s greatest writers, editors, and professors, and I’m sure there will be more to come when I am gone. But who will take my place? We will just have to see - and when they come, I hope they have as much fun on Manuscripts as I did. May they further the presence of the arts at Butler, as so many are doing now...goodness knows that this university needs it.

Thank you, everyone,

Camille Bates
Camille Bates has been creating art since before the Earth cooled. She enjoys watching obscure 80s anime, befriending wild geese (that she affectionately refers to as "hellbeasts"), and reading various feminist texts. She needs to stop playing Minecraft so much and finish her commission website, but in the meantime, she is pursuing a career in arts education for all ages. If you happen to spot this queer, elusive creature in your area, please feel free to join her in whatever artistic mess she happens to be making.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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*Family Gathering at the Lake*

Steven is an English and Secondary Education double-major with a minor in Sport Coaching from Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

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*Black Shadow*
*Phonetic Shock*

Shauna Sartoris became a creative writer at the age of seven and has been writing ever since. She writes extensively about her experiences living in Nairobi, Kenya, where she was born, and her later transition to the United States. Fascinated by the cadence and manipulation of language, she is currently earning her undergraduate degree at the University of Indianapolis, double majoring in Professional Writing and Creative Writing. Shauna has been previously published in Uindy’s Etchings magazine (volumes 29.2 and 30.2), and in Z-Publishing House’s 2018 anthology Indiana’s Best Emerging Poets. She can be contacted at sartoriswrites@gmail.com.

Tyrah Chery
*Golden Hour*
*The child says nothing, but what it heard by the fire*

Originally from Long Island, New York, Tyrah Chery is currently a sophomore at the University of Indianapolis majoring in English/Creative Writing and minoring in Art History. Chery creates poetry based around her cultural experiences as a Haitian-American and hopes to emphasize the importance of multiculturalism. In 2018, Chery was awarded second place for the Lucy Munro Brooker Poetry Award for her poem “The child says nothing, but what it heard by the fire”.
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*Garden of Tomorrow*

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*i, David*
*SPIDER LEGS*

Courtney Worley is a sophomore at Butler University. She is studying Creative Writing and Neuroscience and enjoys the attempt to express herself through poetry and prose.

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*Aristaeus*

Miriam Berne is a student at Butler University. She started writing in seventh grade. Her mom encouraged her to submit to the local libraries poetry competition and to her pleasant surprise she won first place in the middle school category in the Jane Hirschfield Memorial Poetry Competition. In high school, her work was featured in a student-run production called Writer’s Showcase, as well as the literary magazine, The Paperclip. Though majoring in Criminology, she picked up a minor in Creative Writing to continue, grow and expand her passion. Oh, and she has a small obsession with bees.

Matt Del Busto
*I carry a torch as warning*
*Today I saw wolfinmoon*
*Take Notes*

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*anxietyscape*  
*chroma*  
*retrospection*

Jeremy K. Gruner is an interdisciplinary artist currently studying at Butler University, where he is involved with both the music and dance departments.

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*A Kiss of Jameson*

Sierra is sophomore at Butler University with a love for art. She can most likely be found listening to the whispering wind tap against her bedroom window.

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*The Essence of Hemlocks*

Haley Huelsman attended two years of her undergraduate at Butler University, studying Secondary Education with a concentration in English and a minor in Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies. She currently lives with her parents in Ohio and will attend The University of Dayton in Spring 2019.

Ian Hunt
*My Alcoholic Mother Died Last Week*

Ian Hunt is a queer theatre artist from Cincinnati, Ohio. He would like to state that his work is a fictional and his mother is fine.

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*8th Grade Search History*

Natalie Urban is a Freshman at Butler University. She is currently an Exploratory Studies major but hopes to declare a double major in Creative Writing and Spanish.
Kareen Casillas

Someone please, tell me: Was this Sexual Assault?

Kareen Casillas is Haley Huelsman’s alias. On where the name Kareen Casillas originated: Kareen is Ms. Huelsman’s mother’s middle name, from the Dalton Trumbo antiwar book Johnny Got His Gun. Casillas was her maternal great grandmother’s maiden name. By providing her real name Ms. Huelsman desires others, particularly survivors of sexual assault, to know they are not alone.

Shaun'tae Swanson

Criticize Me, If You Please

Shaun'tae Swanson is a sophomore at Shortridge High School. Her writing is influenced by what she witnesses and experiences as a female, as a teenager, as an African American, as a student, and as a human being.

Jared Kohn

The Fool

Jared Kohn attends Butler University and is a firm believer in the power of art as the vernacular of the human soul. He loves the people in his life, namely his mother, father, and two sisters, all of which have helped shape him into the person he is today. The person who celebrates humanity, art, and sacrificing safety for fun knowing full-well that he’s been blessed with only one life.

Con Murray

Devil’s Drink

Con is a senior English - Creative Writing major who spends way too much time in the library, probably. He is a big fan of dogs and books, so please ask him about those instead of what he’s doing after graduation.
Melinda Peterson

Melinda Peterson is a sophomore at Butler University from Grafton, WI. She has been interested in photography since getting her first camera at age 9, focusing more heavily on landscape, though occasionally dabbling with portraits.

Madeleine Lucchetti

Madeleine Lucchetti is a senior at Butler University, where she studies English and dance performance. She writes for The Butler Collegian as an opinion columnist, and hopes to pursue a career in creative writing somewhere back home on the East Coast.

Josie Levin

Josie Levin is a visual artist and poet. She lives in Indianapolis, reads large volumes of books and occasionally writes her own. She has been published in several publications, including Ink & Voices, The 2River View, and Slaughterhouse Magazine.

Viki Tomanov

Viki Tomanov is currently a Senior at Butler University. She is an English and Middle/Secondary double-major with a minor in Spanish. She loves literature, language, and alliteration.