Caesura

(sī-zyur’-ə) n. pl. -suras, -surae
In modern prosody: usually a rhetorical break in the flow of sound in the middle of a line of verse. Greek and Latin prosody: a break in the flow in the middle of sound in a verse by the ending of a word within a foot. Break, interruption. A pause making a rhythmic point of division in a melody.

Caesura is the University of Delaware English Department’s student Literary Annual. Work is submitted, selected, and edited by an all-student staff. All submissions are considered for publication anonymously.

Production Notes

The text of Caesura features the font family ITC Tiepolo, named after Italian artist Dominic Tiepolo and designed by AlphaOmega Typography’s Cynthia Hollandsworth Batty in 1987. Designers describe it as a sans serif font with serifs.

The font Chalet Comprimé Hong Kong Sixty and Hong Kong Seventy (numerals), two of ten varieties of the Chalet Comprimé family created by Delaware-based type foundry House Industries, was used for page titles and cover numerals.

The font Desdemona, an open face based on John F. Cumming’s c. 1886 font Quaint and designed in 1992 by David Berlow for Font Bureau, was used for the cover and title page word “Caesura,” the words that indicate section headings, and the caesura motif icon.

The cover photodllustration features pieces of four of the art entries—“Rainy Day Raindrops,” “Spirograph,” “Window,” and “Challenging the System.”

Three hundred copies of Caesura were printed on #70 Dotmar Cougar Natural text and #80 Dotmar Cougar White cover in April 2018.

Design: Deshon & Associates
Printing: University of Delaware Printing
Dedication

This year’s Caesura is dedicated to the memory of Starke John Gregory, a friend and longtime supporter of the creative literary arts at the University of Delaware. His support of students will be cherished and remembered fondly by the many students and faculty whose lives he touched. The English Department will be forever grateful for his generosity and his warm interest in our students and their writing.

Acknowledgments

Caesura is made possible by a generous donation from the Gregory family. The staff of Caesura would especially like to remember Arthur and Mary Jane Gregory for their generosity in supporting this literary magazine and helping it to flourish. Additionally, we would like to thank Andrea Schoen-Gregory and Gary Schoen and Elizabeth Gregory for their continuing support and dedication to creative writing at the University of Delaware.

Many thanks to John Ernest, Chair of the English Department, for his ongoing and enthusiastic support of creative writing, and to Nina Warren, for her administrative help with all things Caesura.
The Elda Wollaeger Gregory Poetry Award*
“Blessings of a To-Be Widow” by Kat Steward
“My Hair is...” by Rahsel Holland

Academy of American Poets Harold Taylor Prize
“Love in Color” by Jasmine Edwards

The Thomas W. Molyneux Fiction Award
“Brewing” by Nicole Morfitt

The Thomas W. Molyneux Creative Nonfiction Award
“The Silent Matriarch” by Julia Lowndes

Caesura Art Award
“A Picture is Worth a Thousand Nerds” by Anthony Grubb


Denise Eno Ernest is a painter and photographer with a BFA in Painting from Cornell University’s College of Architecture, Art and Planning. Her paintings are abstract works in mixed media using a three-dimensional landscape by either creating shapes that attach to her paintings or using the paint itself to create dimensionality using the juxtaposition of paint with silk fabrics. Ernest’s photography centers on looking for the abstract within the real. Ernest’s studio is in her home in Landenberg, Pennsylvania. Her work can be seen online at Denise Eno Ernest Studios, deniseenoernest.com.

*named in honor of Arthur’s first wife
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*A Picture is Worth a Thousand Nerds

Art by Anthony Grubb
Being a Journalist

Monique Harmon

I always wanted to tell a story.
Make the characters, set the scene,
Sprinkle a few plot twists here and there.

But I never imagined the story would fall in my lap. I never imagined that
Daily discussions,
What the president said,
The actions of people in this country,
The weather,
Who hit a home run,
Which team won the World Series,
Who died last night,
Would become my story.

I am a journalist.
I gather information.
I listen.
I articulate.
I hide behind my sources.
Because I am not the story.
I write it.
And I speak it.
I am a future widow. I’ve read the part and I have accepted the role fully and gladly. We premiere May 23, 2020, 5:15 p.m.—weather permitting. And we end too soon.

I will not have days in the late 2060s on the back porch with my wrinkled companion of defective (selective) hearing. He will not scar our grandchildren by stealing their freckled noses. In fact, they will have trouble remembering his name. But you can’t blame the children; they never met him. They know only of the kooky-but-sweet Great-grammy Kat. “Why is she named after an animal, mom?”

I will not hear him hum century-old tunes that he forgets the lyrics to despite having sung them for decades. We will not share intense living room competitions of The Price is Right at 11:17 a.m. on a Tuesday. He will not tap me and ask, “What was the name of that video game I liked when we were teenagers? The dystopian one.” I will not shout, “Nose goes!” and force him, as the loser, to be the one to shovel the driveway. “Why didn’t we just move to Florida like every other retired couple?”

But we do have these days. These limited, beautiful days filled with cheese and pepper omelets—because it’s the only thing either of us can cook—Waffle House—because we’re not sophisticated enough to enjoy proper food—and Billy Joel’s “You’re My Home”—which I will be crooning after they’re both long gone.

We will tame the stray neighborhood cats that wander through that back door we mostly accidentally leave ajar. We will waltz in the space between the island and kitchen chairs Without music and with unsure steps. We will sing cacophonic versions of The Beatles and Queen and

*Blessings of a To-Be Widow
Kat Steward

Caesura
Regina Spektor (as soon as I get him to like her) after a long
day at work—
one that he spent observing gruesome corpses and I spent grading
gruesome essays.

He will go
too soft
and too soon
and too unheralded.

He chose this future
and so do I.
Beo

Judy Pelham

Beo was repeating third grade.

Little, with a husky physique, he was the type of kid who grew up short and chunky,
short and muscular...
short.

Kindergarteners overlooked this nine year old.

His white tee shirt always peeked out from an unruly shirt.
Hand-cuffed, dingy pants had been cut-down to size.

Neighborhood kids said Beo’s dad beat him regularly: if Beo’s teacher called to complain about school behavior, which happened every week, or if Beo cried at bedtime, ate half his dinner, wet the bed, or was in the room when his dad was drunk.

They said he took after his daddy—in build and temperament.

Beo’s class had Reading the first two hours.
However, he had difficulty learning to read from the principal’s office.

So, Beo was repeating third grade.
Dark Skin Girl

Jonay Desire

I can’t believe there ever was a time when I tried to hide who you were to me.
Growing up it seemed as if the only things you could bring to me were stares, glares, and rude things.
Like having your “friends” ask you to sit out of the picture this time because they want the caption to read “Bad Redbones Only.”
Or a time when a guy denies his ties with you because he’s trying to impress his dudes.
“Ayo Charlie! You fool with dark skin girls now? I didn’t know you like ‘em burnt!”
“Who me? Ew, nah bro.”
Can you guess where he ended up?
CUT
Or hearing “Wow! You’re pretty for a dark skin!”
And having to pause to think if the words I heard were an attempted compliment or down right absurd.
As if “beautiful” and “dark” are two opposing contradicting words.
I catch an attitude and he says in return,
“Nah, it wasn’t even like that.”
Boy, bye, I’m already deterred.
“Pretty for a dark skin?”
Even to dark guys dark girls can’t seem to win.
And the funny things is, even if he’s darker than the skin I’m in,
To be with a dark girl, is like this sin!
And it’s crazy, ’cause I know girls who carry this false doctrine within.
I mean, I can’t even begin to explain, as if their skin color causes them pain...I’m sick of it!
And if I’m to bring a daughter into this world it needs to change quick!
Keep replaying these words till it sticks.
So, that bubble of low self-esteem, right now, stick a pin in it.
You have no room to be filled with it.
So that bubble of low self-esteem right now, stick a pin in it.
It’s time to wear that beautiful dark skin with a grin on it.
Sitting in a coffee shop, I remember that I kind of suck.

I watch my brother stand behind the counter
and lean over to his girlfriend,

“She’s a human garbage can.”

*I don’t even know what that means.*

“Just look at her.”

I know what he means.

I have no money while sipping a five-dollar latte
and I can’t manage to save face these days.

Look, I know he was kidding, but still.

The world is burning,
people are starving,
healthcare is insufficient,
veterans are homeless,
and more than 200 were just killed in an
attack

on an Egyptian mosque as I write this.

Sitting, cozy, in a coffee shop, I remember that I suck.

But, I am not
dead,
hungry,
sick,
or homeless.

I have a brother that is breathing,
not a corpse in a mosque,

and he makes a damn good latte.
Challenging the System

Art by Xander Opiyo

The effect of juvenile delinquency on later recidivism in adult life.
Enough
Grace McKenna

When you asked if this was alright
I flinched.
I’ve had dreams of people
asking permission,
but when you did, I felt...
important

he took my notebook and read it
every day for 15 months
and that is how even my most private thoughts
became lies
he took the truth away

but you have never asked
never mentioned a word for me
about ensuring that I’m writing about you.
(It’s all about you.)

It breaks me
when I see you
because I am reminded, often,
of how you deserve so much more
than I can give
and it especially breaks my heart
when you say I am
perfection.
When you say I am your
favorite.
When you say I am
enough for you.
If I am the best thing you've had
Then I apologize.
you deserve
gold woven bedsheets and
women made from the inner souls
of springtime flowers

I have been both
broken and lost so often
that I feel empty when I am neither

Tell me that I should be doing more for you.
He stood at the balcony, staring into the night sky, 
Like he did every Friday night.

He loved gazing at constellations, yet he detested stars. For stars 
always looked the same, yet they slowly travelled away—away 
from their constellations, 
away from their home.

As he continued to gaze at the stars, he thought of them, in 
particular her, 
his favorite.

She was independent, stubborn and too ambitious for her own 
good, but she was his favorite. She no longer lived with him, at 
least for now that is. He was broken when she had left, but it 
was what she wanted. Besides, she had only been gone for 
three years. Only a year left and he would have her back.

Back home.

The vibration of his phone interrupted his thoughts. Reaching for 
his phone in his pocket, he turned his back on the night sky and 
once he saw her name across the screen he smiled. He hadn’t 
smiled since her last call.

Her voice, it was still the same. It always brought back joyful 
memories. His smile widened. But it soon faded. Her words had 
made his happiness short-lived.

She had said she wouldn’t be returning at the end of the year. She 
wouldn’t be returning anytime soon. He could no longer entertain 
the conversation, he told her bye and hung up.
He returned his phone to his pocket. Leaned on the rails of his balcony, threw his face up to the night sky and wept.

She wasn’t coming back. His daughter wasn’t coming home. And so he wept, while gazing up at the night sky.

But this time,
there were no stars to gaze at.
Honey: (can be replaced with the word “chocolate,” “vanilla,” “caramel,” etc.) This is a declaration of self-love

Quader’a Henry

The feel, sticky fingers
The smell, sweet skin
The look, beautifully golden
As I sit outside I feel the sweetness from the sun fall onto me
As my body gets warmer, perfectly caramelized
As I see people passing by, staring at my honey
I feel the pressure, and deeper the honey goes
I take a look at my skin and smile with pleasure
No longer feeling the pressure of narrowing eyes
I embrace my honey, as it’s god’s gift to me
Honey, honey, honey! Beautifully caramelized!
Ballerina Bun
Art by Alicia Fox
*Love in Color*

Jasmine Edwards

He drank blue POWERADE,
and he drove a black car.

The football team put him in green and yellow,
and his favorite beer was red.

Maybe that’s why he loved those colors so much—
familiar. Like his hand around my waist
as he paraded me about, his golden queen.
Like my wide white smile.

And then it’s porcelain foundation,
orange turtlenecks,
anything brighter than the bruises
or the grey memory of his hands around my throat.

I popped pink bubblegum,
and ignored my purple ribs.

I said I’ve got a rainbow love,
and isn’t that a dream come true?
I think it is.

I said I’ve got a rainbow love,
and isn’t that a dream come true?
I hope it is.
Handpaper
Art by Anthony Grubb
Me Too
Kathleen Spillan

Waking on the bathroom floor—
the night comes in waves
streaming down her face.
Needing to conceal the whiskey
colored bruises, his fingers remained
on her body—grip of affection.

Feeling betrayed, displayed.
He tied her noose, hanged
her for the world to see,
put on trial to defend herself, contend she didn’t agree.

They painted her as the Wicked Witch—
antagonist for ruining his bright future.
They painted her as Pinocchio—
feeling the need to lie for attention, for money,
to cover up a drunken mistake.

Suddenly you remember:
The time you weren’t allowed to wear a two-piece
even though it was August in North Carolina
when you were six.
The time a boy snapped your bra
on the playground and the teacher told you
that meant he liked you
when you were nine.
The time you walked home from school
and thirty year old men yelled how sexy
your legs were from their porch
when you were twelve.
The time you were dancing with your friends
and a boy grabbed you from behind
and rubbed himself against you
when you were fifteen.
The time you were with your friend in his dorm room and he force-fed you citrus Burnett’s and locked the door behind him when you were eighteen.

“Me too” is an understatement.
My Hair is...

Rahsel Holland

My hair is...
Well it's curly.
Curls go each which way but right.
They do their own thing,
No matter how much I try to adjust them.
I had to learn to tend to them,
Rather than making them tend to me.
I'm natural and egocentric and closer to my roots,
But I'm also rapidly changing.
You see I could have curly hair one week and braids the next.
Or I could buy a wig and wear it like a cap.
People say, “You have so much hair you don’t need to add any.”
They don’t know that I like options.
They don’t know that there is reason to this madness.
They don’t know that sometimes I just need a break from curls.
I love my curls but,
It’s nice to use a protective style to
Shield it and promote growth.
Sometimes it’s fun to have hair down my back.
But nothing is like the feeling of my curls liberating me.
When my curls are free, I am free.
I sing, “I’m every woman” in my head.
I have a pep in my step like no other.
I am more confident about myself.
I feel exotic.
I feel like a black queen.
I feel free.
I am my hair, and my hair is me.
These knotty balls of frustration that I fight with on a daily basis,
I know they just want to roam openly.
They want to blow in the wind.
They want to be the future and the past.
They want to escape,
Escape from the captivity of a hair tie.
My curls wave to neighbors as though everyone will accept them.
But, even if they are not accepted, they wave anyway.
My curls smile in the face of sisters and brothers,
And they smile back in confirmation.
My curls stand proudly in front of disapproval.
Yes, they do not mind the disapproval.
My curls know what their purpose is.
To eat hair products,
To spread joy,
And to release tension.
My hair is freedom.
Seven Deadly Virtues

Stella Castor

transgender pride
loving yourself, despite others’ hatred
transgender envy
wishing to be viewed as others are
transgender sloth
not being a voice for all those like you
transgender lust
unfiltered desire for someone similar
transgender gluttony
pills sliding down your throat, twice daily
transgender greed
desperately seeking your own stability
transgender wrath
fighting back against those who would hurt you
A Monochromatic Haze

Art by Xander Opiyo
CREATIVE NONFICTION
Rainy Day Raindrops
Art by Alicia Fox
Hospital Horology

Leanna Smith

The sirens were silent when the ambulance picked me up from student health. Despite the nurse’s insistence that my heart rate was dangerously high, there was none of the cinematic drama and urgency that I imagined would be involved in an ambulance ride. The EMTs were calm and deliberate as they strapped me to the stretcher and hoisted me into the vehicle. There was no red-light running or high-speed traffic weaving; instead, we waited in solidarity with the 9-to-5 workers heading home for dinner.

I stopped by student health that afternoon because I had been experiencing heart palpitations for about two weeks, and they were becoming increasingly distracting. I assumed that the palpitations were merely a new manifestation of anxiety or a symptom of sleep deprivation and expected student health to dismiss me as another stressed and over-caffeinated student. I had grown so used to my rapid heart rate that I could barely believe it when the wide-eyed nurse told me that I was sustaining a resting rate of 180 beats per minute (bpm) compared to the normal range of 60-100 bpm.

While the EMT pressed my wrist to check my pulse, I examined the interior of the ambulance. The space felt claustrophobic and was dimly lit. The storage of the medical equipment reminded me of what you might see in a particularly organized kitchen pantry. Small metal cabinets lined the walls, and each was marked with a white strip from a label maker. One sticker read “EBOLA KIT.” The adjacent cabinet held two teddy bears.

After the unhurried ambulance ride, I was prepared to wait in the notoriously long queue for the Emergency Department. I did not wait one moment. The tempo of the world around me shifted as soon as I entered the hospital. I changed into a gown, leaving my clothes strewn in a pile by my backpack, and was situated in a room with a doctor and at least five nurses. The doctor reminded me, in both appearance and disposition, of Chris Traeger, an intense and fanatically healthy character played by Rob Lowe on Parks and Rec. Although I am sure that it is a somewhat
procedural question, it felt pointed when one of the first things he asked was, “Do you know of any family history of sudden death at a young age?”

Working in expeditious unison, as if my heart rate was their metronome, the nurses connected me to an IV with fluids, a pulsoximeter, and stuck on defibrillator pads “just in case.” They administered a slew of different drugs through my IV and had me perform physical movements that were all unsuccessful in triggering responses to slow down my heart. They were cycling through their treatment options so quickly that it wasn’t until after they completed them that they had time to explain what they had done and why. I could barely keep up. The persistent beeping of my heart monitor rang in my ears, and I started to wonder how much longer it would be until my father would arrive from New Jersey.

In the middle of the chaos, a nurse explained that they were going to try a different drug, adenosine, which has very high success rates for fixing heart arrhythmias, but it would make me feel uncomfortable. The doctor sat near my bed with clasped hands and interjected. “Listen,” he said, “what I tell my patients is that this medicine is going to make you feel like absolute shit for five seconds.”

The nurse swiftly pushed the dosage into my IV, and I immediately felt a leaden wave course through my veins. I don’t know if I closed my eyes, but the room fell black. My chest felt heavy, like my body was caving in on itself. I expected to feel pain, not to experience a panic-inducing darkness—what I imagine death feels like. The drug twisted time in a way that made five seconds feel like an hour. I somehow mustered the strength to whisper a response to the foreboding doctor. “I see what you mean.”

I later learned that adenosine is essentially the cardiac version of “try turning it off and back on again.” The drug slows down your pulse so much that you become nearly asystolic. Usually, this acts
as a reset button, and a patient’s heart returns to a normal rhythm. However, after the initial heart rate drop, my pulse spiked back to the 180s. The Emergency Department had done all they could, so I was admitted to the hospital.

The first night in the Emergency Department was quick and hectic, but the subsequent six days on the cardiac-failure floor passed slowly. Most of my time was spent waiting—waiting for a room to open, waiting to hear the opinion of another cardiologist, waiting to get back echocardiograms, blood tests, and electrocardiograms. After all of the screening and monitoring, my cardiologists determined that I had a type of heart arrhythmia called supraventricular tachycardia (SVT). There was no structural problem with my heart, but there was an electrical one. The currents that control my heart’s rhythm were being disrupted by an extra electrical pathway with which the doctors assumed I was born. Instead of following a normal circuit, the electricity in my heart would loop through the extra pathway and go into overdrive. Although SVT is fairly common and typically manageable, my situation was unusual because the doctors could not get the abnormal rhythm to break.

Even with a diagnosis, uncertainty continued. I waited to see if medicines would work and, when they didn’t, I waited to be squeezed into the surgery schedule. It was tedious to be trapped in a constant pause, always unsure of the next step. Time trickled by, and stagnant days were exacerbated because the drugs that were supposed to slow my heart also depressed my other systems. My grogginess blended the days together even more.

As I waited, my days were only punctuated by the actions of others. My bed was alarmed, so I could only get up when a nurse came and monitored me. Even then, I was only allowed walk the three-foot stretch to my bathroom. On the third day, I was allowed to shower, but instead of feeling freed, I felt vulnerable without the
familiar ticking of my heart monitor. Trauma and stroke alerts blared over the speaker system periodically throughout the day, a persistent, sobering reminder that somewhere in the building someone was having the worst day of his/her life. The nurses checked my vitals every few hours, meals came promptly and early, my parents alternated who stayed with me, and the nurses switched shifts. Change happened around me, but not to me. This was a stark difference compared to my life at school, where I was independent and assertive in my daily life.

Throughout my stay in the hospital, time fluctuated between moving hastily and halting. On Monday, the fifth day of my stay, I underwent a cardiac ablation procedure where the doctors identified the problematic electrical pathway and then blocked currents from passing through the path. To do this, they snaked catheters up through veins in my legs and burned the pathway to electrically create impermeable scar tissue. For me, the anesthesia made the surgery vanish, but for my father, who was stuck in the waiting room, it was the longest four hours of his life. Despite the seemingly regimented schedules in a hospital, everyone is experiencing the same amount of time differently.

I noticed this lack of temporal universality again, 24 hours after my surgery, when I was practicing walking with a nurse on my floor. I hunched over and walked slowly because of my sore and wounded legs. As we circled the floor, I peered into rooms. All of the patients were elderly men. I stole glances of their faces and realized that I was lucky to feel so young and secure. For me, dying was never really a tangible option. Sure, the heart problems were scary, but I had my youth (and an accompanying invincibility complex) and my health on my side. I was energized because the doctors told me that the surgery had a 90% chance of curing my condition. That was not the case for almost all of the other patients on the floor. While I walked around feeling like there was infinite
time ahead of me, others felt the shadow of death looming.

After I was discharged from the hospital, I was eager to restore a sense of normalcy. But, when I returned to the sidewalks of the University of Delaware, I felt like a stranger. My feet felt unfamiliar below me, my legs ached, my chest was suspiciously quiet, and I felt distanced from my peers. The interconnectedness of everyone's schedules and experiences became so apparent after I had separated from it. The sidewalks were bustling between class times, the dining halls had lines at 12, Morris Library had no open seats during exam weeks. My heart steadied back to its normal rhythm and, soon enough, I reacclimated to the consistency of school.

I felt at home. But then, against the odds, my heart started racing again.
...is Good for the Gander

Art by Kanisha Clark
The Silent Matriarch

Julia Lowndes

My grandmother has always been Babcia to me. As a kid, I’d assumed it was her name—an odd, foreign name that got jumbled in my mouth, the way English words got jumbled in hers. But as I grew up, I learned that “babcia” meant “grandmother,” and that my mother had a babcia, and that woman had a babcia as well. It was strange to learn that a word that meant so much to my family wasn’t owned by just us. Everyone has a babcia, whether they know the word or not.

My babcia was born in Obrowo, Poland, in 1931. This was a strange and tragic set of cards that were dealt to her at birth; instead of diamonds and spades, she was given war and displacement. When she was a young girl, her family was transported to Siberia by Russian troops during WWII. From there, she was shuffled between Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Egypt. At her kitchen table in Upstate New York, Babcia told us these stories of deportation and broken families in the way someone would read from a dictionary: unquestionably. She told her stories in English for the sake of her American grandchildren, but where our language failed her, Polish bridged the gaps. My mother acted as a translator in these moments, whispering words in English to me and my older sister, as our babcia spoke with a puzzling mix of bitterness and resolution. After 14 years of sitting at her kitchen table, I never learned Babcia’s native language, one that made up at least half of my genealogy. The only way I can think to explain this is that Polish was her past, and we were her future.

When I think about Babcia, I see her large, white house in Upstate New York. The house was unequivocally hers, even though my grandfather had lived there with her for decades. His signature was probably scrawled on the mortgage bills, but my babcia’s presence took up every nook of it. Her kitchen was always sizzling with food; fresh kielbasa from the nearest Polish deli greeted us when we walked through the front door, and kotleti with mushroom sauce seemed to be constantly simmering on her old stove. Her needlepoints hung in the bedrooms, and her porcelain dolls lined
the dressers. My mother hated the painting of a weeping child that hung above the bed I'd always slept in, but it had never scared me because it was so clearly placed there by my babcia. Everywhere I turned, I could see her. The bar soap that sat in bulk on her bathroom counter and the scratchy, floral couches were constant reminders of Babcia's proximity.

My childhood was marked with visits to that home. It housed our Christmas Eves and Thanksgivings, and occupied our free weekends. My family even spent several months living there when we were between houses. Her wooden floors and oriental carpets became the backdrop to my home videos. Even when we weren't visiting her, we were slipping on her carefully knitted socks and sweaters during the winter, and cooking at home with her recipes. Babcia was an ever-present theme in my childhood. In fact, I came to realize that Babcia's absence was as noticeable as her company.

As I grew up, my family moved farther away with the years, but the house remained the same. When I moved to New Hampshire, roughly four hours away, I began to measure time in the number of hours it would take to get back to Babcia's house. I could have driven Upstate twice in the amount of time I spent at school each day. One length of a movie and I could be halfway there. The house was an anchor: no matter where we moved, Babcia was always there, only a conveniently measurable drive away. It stayed the same each time we visited, as if it had been preserved with the smell of wild mushrooms and the dust that gathered in her yarn-filled attic.

If there are two things Babcia had mastered in her 81 years, they were knitting and guilt. My mother called it her "Catholic guilt," and claimed that it was the reason Babcia had gotten plump with age. "There's just so much guilt in there, it fills her up like a balloon," she once told me and my sister while driving the twisted roads to Babcia's house in Cobleskill.

“You don’t love me no more,” Babcia would often say as we
packed our car up after a holiday or weekend trip. Her voice would become a high-pitched whine when she said this, and in all my years I could never figure out if it was said in a facetious tone or with honest belief. Either way, I would feel remorseful every time I sat in the backseat of my mother’s car and watched Babcia wave goodbye from her porch. She never stopped waving until our car was out of sight, and the guilt usually didn’t recede until we were across state lines.

She knew exactly what to say to make me and my cousins completely and totally aware of our privileged lives. If we complained of boredom, Babcia informed us that she hadn’t had the benefit of such a feeling as a child. “When I was a girl, we were never bored,” she would tell us with a scolding tone. “When they sent us out on rafts in Russia, we would pick lice out of each other’s hair for fun.” She would then shoo us off to play with one of our countless toys in shame. If we told her we were full or that we didn’t want to eat the dill pickle soup she made for us, she would embark on a story about a time when she had barely enough food to survive. My mother had learned early to never leave a crumb on her plate when she ate with Babcia, but I never quite caught on. “Look at my little bird eat,” Babcia would coo as she watched me pick at my food.

Like my plate, the bird feeder outside Babcia’s house was never empty. It was situated right outside of the window that looked onto her round glass kitchen table, and Babcia maintained it religiously. The birds that came to her feeder ate scraps of our bread and crackers and whatever else Babcia could think to feed them. She took personal pride in the birds that stayed with her, and when we came to visit, she would update us on the birds she’d seen from her seat at the table since the last time we were there. Humming-birds, chickadees, small sparrows, and if she was lucky, a cardinal or blue jay. In between her church gossip, knitting club drama, and the stories of her childhood, she peppered in narratives about the birds that flew up to say hello.
My family, like those birds, came fluttering in and out of her life. While they ate bread and seeds, we ate borsch, babka, and kielbasa. While they flew to her from neighboring yards, we drove to her from New Hampshire or Long Island or Delaware. The birds were light and airy and complete with winged autonomy, but my babcia was heavy and her legs were tired; she had been cursed with stagnation since she was born. As our family was spinning and splintering, Babcia remained where she was since she had been freed from the displacement of war. She was a Pole living in America, a woman who had never quite shaken her identity but had adapted with necessity. Babcia was our silent matriarch. She was never loud, but her presence demanded attention. Dziadek, my grandfather, may have been the man of the house, but Babcia was the head.

Ever since she died five years ago, her house sits empty for most of the year, a skeletal structure still filled with remnants of before. A wooden staircase for a spine, stain glass windows for eyes, and a kitchen table for a heart. Dziadek spends most of his time on Long Island and only goes Upstate to check on the house and to try to convince my mother to sort through more of Babcia’s things. I wonder if the house is still too full of her presence for Dziadek, the way it is for me. I haven’t been to her house since the funeral, but I sometimes imagine that the attic is still overflowing with yarn and stills smells dusty and antique. I imagine that the perpetually weeping painted child looks over my favorite bedroom to this day, and that Babcia’s collection of jewelry still rests in her closet, a glimmering and tempting assortment that once danced in my sister’s and my dreams.

When Babcia died, it brought our family together for the first time in years. We gathered in her house and stood in the familiar kitchen, this time in stiff black dresses and suits rather than pajamas and sweatpants. I tried not to look at the chair she had sat in not long ago at her kitchen table, but its vicinity was an obvious reminder that even when she wasn’t there, Babcia was the center of our family. We were planets in orbit, and now that our sun was gone,
we were scattered and tumbling and at a loss for stability. A stark white hospital bed took up most of her living room, a cruel intruder and a declaration of the cancer that had weakened her until she was gone. I didn’t look at that room.

It was odd, yet fitting that Babcia’s funeral was the thing that could bring my family together under one roof. It wasn’t that we fought or were hateful, it was perhaps that we were detached and generally disconnected. For the 14 years that my life had overlapped with Babcia’s, she had been our hub—the thing that unified us. When we collected ourselves in her kitchen that last day, I think it was the only time there wasn’t food on the stove or knitting needles on the table. Stories of her flew freely, and I saw snapshots of the woman my babcia had been for other people. She had been a mother, a coworker, a sister, and a friend. She was a million things, but it seemed to me that she had always been the sustenance.

I often find myself wondering what Babcia would think of things now. I wonder if she would be proud of me and my siblings and my cousins—the new generation she created. I wonder if she would think I’m being wasteful or lewd or lazy. But, I like to think she would be happy, or at least content, because I’m here, and I’m woman, and I’m living a life that is free of the strife and hostilities she survived. I’m here, and one day I can carry on her matriarchy, whether I choose for it to be silent or not.

I see my babcia in birds. I’m reminded of the birds that once visited at the sunny window by her kitchen table. In life, they were opposites. Babcia had never truly been free; guilt and strife weighed her down for 80 years. It left her body burdensome and her bones grieving. But, she found joy in the beauty of the sparrows and the finches and their feathered independence. She would watch them—her fleeting friends—as they fluttered in the bushes of her garden, flying up and down, before finally escaping somewhere beyond her fenced-in yard—her teachers of what liberation could finally mean.
Precariously Perched

Art by Amanda Davin
The Wilting
Soo Kyoung (Annie) Lee

There are always flowers waiting for me when I return home. Sunset daisies, soft lavender morning glories, snow-white camellias... there’s even been talk of adding black roses (but, until later, I won’t break the news to my parents that they don’t actually exist). This time of year, there are also little burlap scarecrows popping out of the ground in front of my porch. But they do not scare anyone; they’re smiling, and so are my parents, as my sister and I pull up to the driveway, trying not to run over any of the newest additions to their ever-growing garden.

It’s hard to say whether the floral arrangements are for celebration or for mourning. Maybe my parents are just glad I’m back from living in my own world, separate from theirs, but I can’t pretend like this new green-thumb condition of theirs isn’t to distract from their children leaving home. I can tell from the way my mother’s fingers squeeze against my waist when she hugs me. *Are you eating enough?* They squeeze tighter. *I know you don’t like cooking.* My daddy’s lips press and then linger against my forehead as if he would never get another chance to kiss his daughter again. It makes the heart ache.

Flowers have pumping hearts of their own. Not with four chambers, not with ventricles or valves or beats, but within a process: transpiration. That is, the cycle by which the water of life moves back-and-forth between the Earth and its precious seedlings. A flower’s heart aches for that liquid sustenance that is so dear to life: it takes life up, up, up through the roots, then releases it back out into the atmosphere. It’s a repetitive nurturance: Earth gives, the flower takes; the flower gives, Earth takes.

My parents are my Earth, and I am their flower. Back in South Korea, my mother and father willed me out of dormancy into bloom. When my parents finally taught me to walk on my own, they decided that it’d be best for the family to move halfway across the globe to America. They decided against the comfortable life they knew and against every single person they’d ever known, and
yet, their duty was not to tend to their concerns but to entertain little baby me during that entire 15-hour flight without showing a single regret. And they did.

So, in our youth, my sister and I caught onto English quickly; on top of their old language, my parents could never quite learn. And after ridding ourselves of any remaining accent of Korea, we replaced our heritage with the American culture; my parents held on. Since they’ve left home, my parents have relied solely on themselves; since we’ve left home, they still provide for us. My parents accepted a life of sacrifice so that my sister and I could blossom in the land of dreams more beautifully than they ever got the chance to. Their blood, like water, flows through us in endless circulation: the Earth will provide, regardless of the flower’s location.

Soon will come my turn to give. But the flower is greedier than Earth. A flower’s heart aches so desperately for that ichor of life that it sometimes forgets who’s handing it to them, and too often takes without thanks. It’s an eternal thirst distracting from any other concern, for what else can a flower do but hope for more water? The Earth has seen it all; it no longer thirsts as fiercely. But the flower demands more, more. This endless desire is what blinds the flower to the fact that it is growing too fast and too prettily, that the most prosperous of the bunch is the first to be picked and uprooted from its family.

Flowers used to be my Valentine’s Day, homecoming, prom, graduation, but now they’ve become my “welcome home.” And what can my parents’ flowers, sown into the ground with so much care, do but hope that my sister and I return to revel in their beauty? Welcome home flowers have no meaning if no one ever comes back. They must’ve withered a little every time I ignored a phone call, every time I rejected an offer to “come home” with the excuse that I was too busy. Too busy to pull on my parents’ dirt-stained hands as they helplessly felt themselves fall further and further away.
The summer before my first year of college, my grandmother and cousin came to visit. It was a short visit of two weeks, but their first time seeing the world for which my mom and dad had deserted their old life. My parents had put out flowers then, too. The day after they left, I woke up to my mom on the phone with her sisters, crying because she doesn’t get to see her mother every day, or even most days like they do. And there was nothing practical that she could do about it.

That visit could’ve been the last time she got to see her mom. Somehow, the obvious pain of leaving everything you’ve ever known behind never truly hit me until then. Somehow, two people in this world would not only bear that pain for me, but then aggravate it by setting me— the very thing who they sacrificed everything for—free to wander the world like a drifting dandelion puff, free to decide when, or if, I’ll ever return to them.

Now I know what those flowers on the porch mean. And I know that the garden will wilt one day, and there will come a time when flowers will no longer be awaiting my return to that hopeful foyer. And I know that my home will never be quite as cheery and that the lawn will overgrow carelessly and everything I once knew of my childhood solace will be replaced at the hand of a new generation. I know that one day the newest addition of daisies, morning glories, and camellias will no longer bloom fantastically out of the ground to greet me upon my return. No, rather, they’ll arrive in bunches by my own hand reluctantly upon a solemn place where I’d promised myself I wouldn’t cry.
The Road to Winter

Art by Amanda Davin
Death had never been an impact on my life growing up or even through my teenage years. Not until recently have I truly experienced it. As a kid, I would see it in movies when the actor died and read it in books when I lost my favorite character. I knew it happened and that it had the power to destroy people and families, but I had never really understood it. Collectively, I think humans, even at a young age, are always curious about it, what happens after, why, and other questions to which we all (even as grown-ups) want to know the answers. And I know, having gained more experience in it, I've realized I don’t want to know.

I've thought about death before, my own (when I'm older and grey) and my parents (and what I would do when that happened), but never my distant family. No explanation for why, I just feel as though your extended family is always there, aunts and uncles and grandparents. No matter what the occasion, them not being there had never really crossed my mind. Luckily, I made it to the age of 20 before experiencing a death other than that of a pet.

The only grandfather I ever had was Keith or "Pop," on my mom's side. I had never met my dad's father because he had passed away before I was born. Pop died about a week after my 20th birthday, unexpected and extremely shocking to my family. He had been there for everything in all of our lives—graduations, birthday parties, meeting new boyfriends or girlfriends—always there to lend a helping hand if something broke. Always there for everything. On the bright side, my grandfather lived a very selfless and very fulfilling life, one that I and others envy. An Ohio State alumnus, chemical engineer (brains I wish I had received), he lived overseas in Holland, a father of three daughters and two grandchildren, married for 63 years. The life he lived is the kind that people talk about in movies, and I had always envied the life of my grandfather. To have a successful career and a successful, long, and happy marriage is something I feel everyone wants in life at some point. As much as I miss Pop, I know he lived a long and happy life for the most part, and I hope that I can make it to 85 years old like he
I still remember where I was when I found out about Pop, what I was doing and with whom. I had gone to my friend’s apartment on our school campus, just to hang out and do some homework, until my mom had texted me. All she said was that he was in the hospital, which for someone his age wasn’t truly uncommon, so I didn’t really think anything of it. Until the second text came in that said, “He didn’t make it.” And I still remember that I didn’t believe it. I looked at my friend, showed her the text, and tried calling my mom, who didn’t answer until the third try. My mom was crying on the phone, jumbled words, and I didn’t know what to do besides call my dad. When I cry, I can’t talk to my mom because she’s usually just as, if not more, emotional than I am, whereas my dad is always calm and always tells me it would be okay. So, I called my dad, who was unaware that now my mom and two aunts would never have the luxury of talking to their father again. Looking back now, I realize how lucky I was to be able to call my dad, to be able to talk to him and have him tell me it would be alright. My friend sat beside me as I cried and remembered the last time I saw my grandfather, which was my birthday dinner. I had only ever been told how people react at news of losing a family member, and I always thought they were just exaggerating or making things up about the reactions. But after sitting there and feeling like I was not in control of my own emotions, I was scared and sad. And the worst part is that there is really nothing you or others can do to stop it or make it better. It just has to happen.

My grandfather, being the only one I had, was very important to me. He gave me my first car (a Honda he had owned), made me countless things for my room (he was a craftsmen), and was always telling a sarcastic, unexpected joke or teasing comment. His jokes and comments were always well timed, the perfect joke teller, and I think that’s one thing I miss most. Whenever I see pictures of us together, it’s easy for me to transport myself back there and to have him with me in that moment. Or if it’s a baby
picture and I can’t form a clear memory, the picture itself brings me a smile and reminds me that I was lucky at all to have those memories and times with him.

My grandfather liked to fix or solve anything he could. He was always calling to see if there was anything he could help with and was very active in his neighborhood landscaping, he loved cars and was always fixing up an old MG. And the most recent memory I have of Pop is one of him fixing something, which occurred at my 20th birthday dinner, the last time I saw him. My mom and I had been preparing and cooking and adding dishes to the dishwasher as a family does. And about 15 minutes before my family came, this beeping started; it was very shrill and high-pitched, and my ears couldn’t pinpoint where it was coming from and neither could my mom’s. A running joke in our family was that everyone said Pop couldn’t hear and he needed hearing aids; however, I attributed his “lack of hearing” to selective choice. He had had a wife for years, raised three girls of his own and assisted with one granddaughter. My cousin was the only boy he had. Because he had to listen to so many girls for so long, I always joked that as he got older he chose to ignore them and the rest of the world, hence leading to his lack of hearing. Because whenever you had a direct question or if the TV was on, I joked that Pop would hear it perfectly. So, when Pop arrived at my house on my birthday, along with my aunts and uncle, and the rest of the family, within 10 minutes he had found the noise. He quietly stood by the dishwasher, as I continued to search the house, and asked my mom and I simply “Is this the beeping you’re talking about?” We all died laughing and thanked him for finding the issue as he always did. That’s what Pop did. I loved this memory so much I even spoke at his funeral, none of my family expected it, and, to be honest, I barely expected it from myself. But looking back, I’m happy I stood, and I think my grandfather would’ve been proud of me had he been there.

This whole experience definitely showed me what type of griever I was, because once I was around people I was fine, no tears, and it
was like I hadn’t cried at all. All of a sudden, people, my brothers and my sisters, were asking me if I was okay, and the honest answer was “yes.” I felt fine, after the initial cry, and nothing was off except that my grandfather was no longer here. One of the most eye-opening things was seeing how my family reacted, to see who was crying and who wasn’t or who placed blame on someone else. One of my aunts couldn’t stop crying, which I have trouble dealing with, as I never know what to say and have now learned there is nothing to say. My oldest aunt was similar to my mom, crying at certain times and handling phone calls at others. My grandma was off and on because of medication, would get really happy and remember Pop, and then would just cry. My cousin and I were very alike, not really crying and kind of just carrying on talking about work and school and life. During the funeral was when it hit my cousin and me the hardest. Having to stand as people came around, hugged me and my family, and told me small stories of my grandfather was when it was the hardest. I made it through most of the viewing without breaking down, but, when my close friend came in, I started to feel a blanket of emotions, and it all hit when my dad walked into the room. I couldn’t imagine the loss my mom and aunts felt, as I had left to go hug my own dad, and the idea of losing him only made me cry harder. I think the funeral and my own emotional breakdown had taught me the biggest lesson.

For me personally, the biggest takeaway I got was not the typical “carpe diem,” which I do believe in, but it was to cherish those who are still around and to be more selfless. At my age, it’s easy to get caught up in school work, working, social time, and even easier to forget about family. Losing Pop showed me just how much I want to be around my family, my dad, and my mom especially.

I already knew my parents were my best friends, especially my dad, as I had been a daddy’s girl since I was born. He was the one to quit his job and stayed at home with me, did my hair, took me to parks and playdates. My dad was the closest thing to Pop in
their personalities, even though they aren’t blood related. They were both always trying to fix or improve something. As I got older, I only got closer with my dad. He was always the one to tell me it would be okay, regardless of the situation, or to listen to me complain about people I was in school with, all while encouraging me to do what I loved. To this day, my dad is my date to everything. We go see movies together, watch football together, and go to car shows and other events every year. After losing Pop, sometimes I would get in my own head and would imagine losing my dad or not being able to have a conversation with him. I would get scared and think, “I won’t have this one day, I won’t be able to call or see a movie with him,” and that terrified me and occasionally still does. I’ve learned that I have to move past that, to not think about the future so much and to enjoy the time I have with him now.

It’s similar with my mom, as I grew up I got much closer with my mom until she became one of my best friends. I tell her everything about boys and friends; we plan trips, see plays, and just talk about life. And just like my dad, the thought comes that one day I won’t be able to go to her with a friend problem or life problem, and it’ll just be me. She has always supported me regardless of my decisions, always encouraged me to chase whatever dream I had and wherever it took me. Losing Pop truly made me aware of how easily and quickly someone can be taken away. It scares me how easily things can change but has also changed how I try to go about my life now.

This entire time period of experiencing death has taught me there is almost always a type of beauty within pain. I’ve learned that emotions aren’t bad and that it’s okay to cry (and it’s okay not too), it’s okay to let people hug you, and it’s a beautiful thing to see how people will come together when death happens. It’s also forced me to face the underlying fears I have—of losing my parents, my siblings, or anyone else to whom I’m close. Now, after the funeral has passed and holidays and birthdays start to come up, I have to try and put aside the fear and focus and really take in
the time I have. We will all eventually lose someone, all in different variations of how close we were or how related, but it will never get any easier. Death will always suck. But even through the eventual loss, if I focus on the bad, it’ll only bring more tears, and if I am focusing on the fun and memories I’m making, I’ll get to enjoy the holidays for what they are. Just because I lost someone I love, doesn’t mean I should focus on the fact that death is inevitable. I, we all, have to focus on what’s happening now and to enjoy the time and make the most of it regardless of our fears. I see it as a necessary evil now to teach lessons and to teach people life will go on, but it’s up to you on whether you take the lesson and learn or whether you don’t. And I hope for everyone that has experienced or will experience death (as we all will) that there is something gained with the loss and to live and cherish those who are alive and here to live life together.
Spirograph
Art by Alicia Fox
The teapot screeched.

“I’m done,” said Charlotte, hurling her suitcase down the stairs, bras and socks pouring out.

“You’re not leaving,” said Mary.

“What? Now you want to talk about it!?”

“No, You’re not leaving because it’s pouring outside and your windshield wipers are broken,” she said.

“Mom,” pleaded Charlotte. “How could you not tell me?”

“I did,” said Mary.

“No, you told me he had a heart attack. That he was in the hospital.”

“He was.”

“I never got to tell him goodbye,” said Charlotte.

Mary gestured to the urn. “You can tell him now,” she said.

“What is wrong with you?” she asked, pacing down the stairs. “No funeral? No closure? Cremate him, and move on without telling me?”

“It was my decision,” she said. “I’m the wife.”

“I’m the daughter,” said Charlotte.

“You haven’t spoken to him in years. You haven’t even visited.”

“After all the shit he put us through?”

*Brewing*

Nicole Morfitt

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“You haven’t spoken to him in years. You haven’t even visited.”

“After all the shit he put us through?”
“I don’t know,” said Mary.

They slumped into the kitchen chairs, curling around hot cups of tea.

“He tied me to a tree,” said Charlotte.

“Don’t,” said Mary.

“He tied me to a tree and said we were going to play a game. He beat me with a broom, laughing. And you told me it was my damn fault for being stupid enough to let someone tie me up.”

“I know,” she said.

“You would make me sit in the parking lot of the bar,” continued Charlotte, “while you walked in the front to find him, just in case he saw you coming and ran out the back with another woman.”

“I’m sorry.”

Charlotte looked into her cup, tea rippling in the thunder. “You always chose him over me,” she said.

“He broke my hand,” said Mary. “We were arguing in the tool shed over whether to build your crib. He said we didn’t have the money to buy one, and I said homemade wasn’t safe. He slammed the door when I was still in it. More than once.”

“You could have left, too, you know,” she said.

Mary got up, topped off the tea.

“How long was he in the hospital?” asked Charlotte.

“Not long. I called you minutes after he had the heart attack. He died
a few hours later. I knew it would be days before you could fly in.”

“I want his hat, the blue one,” she said. “A keepsake.”

Mary shifted in her chair. “I threw it away,” she said.

“What?”

“I threw away everything, all of his stuff.”

“Mom…”

Charlotte clinked her spoon on her cup. “Why wouldn’t you leave him?” she asked, looking at the vase on the mantle. Her father.

“Our first car together was a Ford Pinto,” said Mary. “The hood stuck out so far, one of us always had to direct the other as we pulled into the garage. He jumped out every time, holding his arms out like he could control the car with his mind. He’d have his giant, goofy smile on and yell, ‘I am Superman! Come to me!’”

“Remember when I graduated?” asked Charlotte. “It was community college, and I barely passed my classes. But he was so proud, he told everyone I was valedictorian.”

“He used to draw cartoons of the two of us,” said Mary. “He’d leave them all over for me to find. On the bathroom sink, in the car. Your dad knew how to make me laugh.”

They smiled into their cups.

“So how are we supposed to remember him?” asked Charlotte.

They looked at his urn—the golden statue on the fireplace mantel, the metallic baggage on the shelf—and raised their teacups. Brewing.
Window
Art by Kimberly Novak
David dreaded the sound of his alarm clock more than anything else in the world. But here he was again, 6:00 a.m., the loud, steady siren blaring from the table that sat next to his bed. Slowly, he managed to drag himself out of bed, slamming his fist angrily down on top of the clock to shut it up, and shuffled over to the ornate, wooden cabinet that stood next to his closet. This was the reason why he hated the sound of his alarm clock so much; it heralded his daily “appointment,” and this was, unfortunately, his only way there.

His home was a simple one, to the extent of being depressing. There were no family photos hanging from the walls, no decorative mirrors in the halls, no curtains draping across the windows, not even so much as a rug anywhere. There were only the dark, painted walls that were beginning to show signs of age where the corners were chipped, bare hardwood floors that creaked and groaned beneath the weight of every step, ceilings coated in dust and cobwebs, and a persistently musty odor that seemed to be infused into the entire building. A raggedy, mold-ridden sofa, splintered kitchen table with chairs to match, a cracked dusty leather armchair, and bare mattress were the only pieces of furniture apart from the cupboard that stood next to David’s closet. This cabinet was by far the most luxurious item in the entire house, which was surprising given the nature of what rested on the shelves, hidden behind the dark chestnut doors.

Taking a deep breath, David grasped the cabinet’s doors and looked over his meager inventory. Razor blades, some empty bottles of pills, a rusted metal spike (still crusted with dry blood, of course), some singed electrical cords, a small box of nails and a hammer, a handful of staples… he had used these all before. David realized just how low his stock was and decided that he was finally going to have to start getting more creative in his methods. The basics simply were not going to cut it anymore. Still, before he resolved himself to more desperate measures, there was one more “simpler” method that, he had to admit to himself, he had always
been curious about, and decided that this was as good a time as any to give it a try.

Making his way down the stairs to the kitchen, David reflected on how funny it was, or at least as funny as it could possibly be, that he still had not used this technique before, considering he had been at it for the past three months. All the more reason to do it now, he thought to himself as he grabbed the toaster from its place on the kitchen counter, pulling the plug from the wall and carrying it under his arm back up the stairs.

Filling the bathtub only took a few minutes. While he waited, he couldn’t help but catch a glance of his image in the filthy, cracked bathroom mirror. David had done everything he could to avoid mirrors ever since his first day on the job, and he had to admit to himself that it probably had been for the best. He really wasn’t looking so good, and he was already cursing his peripheral vision for allowing him this ghastly vision of his face. He was looking haggard and worn, his once young face lined with deep wrinkles and covered in a deep shaggy coat of stubble. His hair, once bright and blonde, had lost all its previous shine and looked more like the straw bristles of an old broom. His eyes were gray, hollow, and dead. In a nutshell, he looked like hell.

“A fitting way to look, all things considered,” he quietly muttered to himself.

David didn’t bother to even warm the water up before he climbed in. It wasn’t as if he was planning on spending more than a few seconds in there anyway. After plugging the toaster into the wall socket above the sink, he carried the appliance across the room and carefully balanced it on the edge of the tub, before stepping in and settling himself into the cold water. David shut his eyes tight, bracing himself for what he knew was coming next and picked up the toaster that sat next to him, held out his arms over the water, and prepared for the drop.
“One… two… three!” and the toaster plunged into the shallow tub below.

Several things happened at once. First, there was that initial shock that always follows when electricity meets a body of water. The electric jolt inevitably travelled up through David's body, and, as planned, stopped his heart almost instantly. However, the following few seconds were something that only David could have possibly anticipated.

From his own perspective, he could feel himself sinking beneath the water in the tub, drifting gently downward, far deeper than the tub possibly could be. Looking up at the surface of the water, far above him, David could see his body, dead and useless. The farther that David sank, the warmer the water became, and he noticed that he was now at the familiar point where he no longer needed to breathe. Even after three months, David doubted that he would ever manage to get used to this sensation after a lifetime of relying on the regular intake of oxygen into his system.

The water soon disappeared, and David found himself falling a bit faster now, still kept afloat by the warm air currents that now drifted upward to greet him. The scenery around him slowly faded and changed from the dark curtain of water to the familiar view of orange and brown rock. David couldn't help but look below him as he gently continued to fall and was glad to see the quickly approaching floor beneath him. Not more than a minute later, he found himself on solid ground once again, and, standing upright and dusting the sand and dirt from his bathrobe, which was now once again dry, he began looking for Old Lou.

Old Lou was something of a nickname that David had for his employer, for want of a better term. Lou himself had insisted on it, oddly enough. Lou had so many names, and he hated almost all of them. They were so stuffy, formal, foreboding. Despite his dark nature, there was nothing he hated more than seeming aloof and
unapproachable. The first time David had tried to address Lou by his full name, he only got about as far as “Lucif—” before Old Lou abruptly cut him off.

“Please, please, no need for such mundane formalities. Not here, anyway. Not anymore. I think ‘Lou’ should suffice, my friend. ‘Old Lou.’ Short and simple.”

Say what you would about him, if nothing else, Old Lou certainly was one for keeping up appearances.

The barren plain where David stood was a familiar sight to him by now. Off to his right, what appeared to be westward, judging from the sun, was a sloping hill leading to a high mountain promontory, whose peaks were scattered and dotted with the spires and domes of a vast, sprawling city, which glistened and shone in the rising light. To the east, the plain quickly sloped away to a deep valley, with a city of its own nestled tightly within its walls. Dark, shadowy towers and broken houses composed the vast majority of this metropolis, in contrast to its brother high up on the mountains.

The plain on which David stood waiting stretched, unending, to the north and south, an eternal desert of waste. People called this place many names: The Wasteland, Desert of Purgatory, and, most commonly (and mistakenly) Hell. This desert was most certainly not Hell; that was the city deep down in the valley. David had seen enough there to confirm that for a fact. No, this was merely the middle ground, the “waiting room,” in a manner of speaking. And waiting was exactly what David was doing now. Waiting for Lou.

David could see him approaching now, the tall, slim silhouette coming closer and closer, as it came over the horizon. Lou walked as he always did, swaying back and forth like some kind of grotesque palm tree caught in a strong wind. As he came closer, David could make out the glint of the light bouncing off of Lou’s glasses, and the unearthly gleam of his wide, permanent smile that seemed to stretch from ear to ear. Lou’s long arms were wrapped
and folded about one another across his chest, to keep them from dragging along the floor, as they tended to do. The black inverted-cross tiepin that he habitually wore was polished to a shine, to match his shoes, and his neatly pressed suit was immaculate, as always.

Lou was certainly a funny looking individual but not in a funny way.

“David! How excellent to see you!” Lou cried out, waving his long, gangly arms high above his head in a gesture of greeting, as he caught sight of his friend (if you could even call David a “friend”). To be fair, Lou didn’t really have many friends, but David was one of those elite few. One could almost feel sorry for Lou, until one met him, at which point one would all too well understand why it was that Lou was such a friendless individual. But by then, it was too late anyway. That was simply the way of things.

As Lou approached, wrapping his arm around David’s shoulder to guide him along to the day’s duties, David couldn’t help but think back to the first day that they had met in this most unlikely of circumstances. It had been a miserable past year for David. Right around March, things had taken their first turn for the worse when David’s girlfriend of four years had left him, clearing out his bank account in her wake and taking his then–best friend Mitchell along with her. Two days later, circumstances only went downhill from there when he arrived, already late, to work, only to find that the entire office had been consumed in a fire the night before, (something to do with a gas leak and a night janitor who apparently couldn’t read the “No Smoking” signs posted at every corner of the hallways). Once the initial shock had worn off, and David returned to his car, he realized that his car had been stolen while he stood agape at the smoking ruins of the office. But the icing on the cake was coming home to find that his apartment had caught fire and destroyed everything while he was on his way to his office (something to do with an open window, a strong breeze, a pair of
overly-long curtains in said window, and a stovetop that was left on after breakfast). Homeless, unemployed, and flat broke, David placed a call to his parents, desperate. And it all would have been fine, had it not been for the tragic, fatal car crash his parents were involved in, on their way to pick him up. The shock of so many things going wrong all at once was simply too much for David. It was the kind of chain of events that could lead a person to kill him/herself.

And, wouldn’t you know it, that was exactly what David did.

That was when he met Lou for the first time and learned of his fate. But Lou, whatever else he might be, was not unfair, and decided to strike a bargain with David. He guaranteed transfer to a warmer and sunnier rest, in exchange for 12 human hours of work every day for the next 1,000 days. There was, of course, a catch, as befitting Lou’s ironic sense of humor. The only way David might arrive each morning was by means of suicide, committed in 1,000 ways.

David accepted the offer gladly. A few hours of menial labor every day seemed a small price to pay for the reward that Lou promised in exchange. Chores such as running paperwork between Lou and other city officials, maintenance work in Lou’s manor, cleaning up after the messy drunken fights that inevitably occur at every party (a rule to which the afterlife was apparently no exception). Essentially, all the usual sort of jobs that no one ever wants to do. Still, 12 hours a day was better than an eternity. Though, to be fair, it all felt the same, more or less.

“Ninety–one down, only 909 to go,” David grunted to himself, as Lou steered him down the main road toward the city, gleaming red and bright before them, as it always did.

“Beg your pardon?” Lou smiled back.
David sighed. “Nothing. Nothing at all.”

Across town, Jack was just opening his doors for business, and a good business it was, especially for one such as him. He was expecting the usual breakfast rush to begin shortly, and he did pride himself on his excellence in customer service. It was time to get the kitchen ready.

Jack turned back inside the diner, walking briskly between the tables and rows of booths to the rear of the building, strolling through the swinging doors into the kitchens beyond. He fired up the grill, so that it would be hot and ready when the first customer came in for a specialty Green Pepper and Kevin Bacon Omelet, or perhaps his signature Southerner-Fried Hash Platter. For lunch, the Asian Stir-Fry was one of the biggest sellers, and he would have to make sure that he had plenty ready for the inevitable crowd. The Cajun Caucasian BBQ had recently become his biggest seller for dinner, and since he introduced it to the menu last week, it continued to grow in popularity every day. If there was one thing Jack loved more than a satisfied customer, it was crafting and perfecting new recipes to share with his loyal patrons.

Jack was, and is still, a cannibal, and sharing his love of fine cuisine with Hell’s residents was his love and his passion. The diner’s walls were covered with signed photographs and memorabilia of his most famous (and infamous) patrons—the prize of the collection, of course, being the signed picture of none other than mister Jeffrey Dahmer himself, who had happened to stop by for lunch on the restaurant’s opening day. Jack had never felt more accomplished with his afterlife than at that moment, and the memory still brought tears of joy to his eyes.

Ahh, and there they were! The first customers of the day, as expected. Jack knew who it was without even having to look.
Old Lou, the head honcho, the big cheese, the number one demon, it was always a pleasure for Jack to see him here! And there was… oh, what was his name? Daniel…? Doug…? something like that. Jack hated to admit it, but he really was quite terrible with remembering names. Regardless, they were usually the first customers of the day, arriving almost as soon as the doors were opened. Whistling merrily while he got to work, Jack produced coffee for his first two patrons of the day, with a small dish of sugar and cream (for the funny little suicide-man—Lou always took his coffee black and bitter), and quickly scurried off to the kitchen to prepare a hot, fresh breakfast.

Jack thought back to his own first encounter with Lou, so many years ago. Of course, he never would have admitted this to anyone, but he had been terrified when he first arrived at the Wasteland plain, with that sickeningly sinister, stick-thin shadow of a man approaching him out of the distance. At Lou’s approach, Jack had fallen to his knees, pleading and begging for forgiveness, for a second chance. He begged mercy for all those people he had sampled as cuisine delicacies all those years. They had just been so tasty, how was he to stop himself? And then Old Lou explained the situation, and Jack couldn’t have been happier!

“Jack, don’t you people up there know anything? Hell is a city just like any other, and just like any other city, she needs people with skill sets to provide services if she is to survive. And you, my friend, have quite the culinary touch, if my information is correct,” he smirked, pulling the long kitchen knife from his sleeve and handing it to Jack.

“Now,” he said, grabbing Jack by the shoulders and turning him towards the valley, “What do you think of that?” Jack found himself standing in front of a small storefront. He could see through the windows that the interior was filled with tables and booths, and he could just make out the kitchen doors at the rear wall.
“It’s all yours, Jack. For all eternity,” Lou said with his familiar grin.

Jack had never been happier in all his life. Or rather, his afterlife, to be precise.

He couldn’t help but notice, with a smirk, that the suicide-man was looking more worn and broken every day. It was so good to see another one learning the ropes and getting the hang of the afterlife. Sure, it was pretty miserable for the first few hundred years, everyone will tell you that. But after that, it’s really not so bad. Lou, of course, was just as bright and chipper as ever, with that damned grin of his still stretching from ear to ear, as was its habit. It made Jack happy to know that not everyone here was depressed all the time, and that he was not alone in knowing how to have a good time with the prospect of eternity. Lou, most of all, should be one such person who understood that. Jack grabbed his favorite knife and got down to work chopping the fresh onions and peppers while the meat sat thawing in the sink. A small crowd began to gather around the front doors and find their way in groups of twos and threes to the tables.

Jack couldn’t help but grin as he stood next to the warm griddle, sizzling with the sounds of “gourmet” breakfast meats and fried vegetables, the steady hiss and popping from the coffee pot, and the chattering of his eager customers out front. Another smile, bigger even than the last one, found itself spreading across Jack’s face as he watched the warm orange sun rise over the horizon and cast its light across the happy scene before his eyes.

“Just another day in paradise.”
Spiral
Art by Kimberly Novak
Moving Forward
Bailee Formon

Friday afternoon was bright with sunshine. The cool, fall breeze provided the music for the colorful leaves to dance through the air. Reds, oranges, and yellows replaced the various shades of green that had previously decorated the trees, and people began to prepare themselves for the nearing bitter-cold weather. The old man sat on a bench near the train station, watching people scurry about with their faces buried in their cell phones, walking forward but always looking down. People ignored each other, aside from the occasional inadvertent collision or half-hearted greeting. The old man felt it strange that people seemed determined to make themselves feel alone, deliberately distancing themselves from everything and everyone around them.

The old man sat with his hands folded in his lap, watching the busy people enter and exit the train station and wondering why they choose to be so busy. He wondered if the stress—or the idea of it—made them feel better somehow. When there is so much to be done, the excuses are abundant, and the time left for thinking is scarce. There’s hardly any time to stop and appreciate life for what it is, but there are plenty of reasons to say that you simply couldn’t.

The old man smiled and greeted people passing by, and most were polite in their responses, but it all felt rehearsed somehow. A young man approached the bench on which the old man sat, but he did not sit down. He simply stood a foot away from the bench with his hands in his sweatshirt pocket, saying nothing. He looked about college-aged, possibly early twenties, and he was the only person there who did not seem to be in any kind of hurry. When he did not speak first, the old man took the initiative. “How are you today?” The young man looked confused by the attempt to initiate a conversation, but the old man patiently awaited his reply. Without any emotion or honesty, the young man replied, “Good, how are you?”

The old man hesitated at first, wondering why he returned the
question if he clearly had no interest in the conversation. It had been a genuine question, but it seemed more a commonplace greeting nowadays. People ask how you are, silently hoping that you can both just say “good” and go about your busy day. The old man knew this was no different, but responded honestly anyway, “I’m doing well, thank you.” The young man said nothing in return, but let the silence be the punctuation mark that effectively ended the conversation. The old man moved the conversation forward, anyway. “Beautiful out today, isn’t it? I heard that the whole weekend is supposed to be this nice.” Once again, the young man seemed confused and a bit bothered by the old man’s friendliness, nevertheless he answered again. “Yeah, it’s nice.”

“What’s your name, young man?” The old man asked. “Thomas,” he said, still standing with his hands in his pockets and avoiding eye contact. The old man noticed that the boy looked forward at the train tracks when he spoke, never at the old man, so he began looking forward as well. “Well, it’s nice to meet you, Thomas. I’m Joe.” Once again, without looking at him, Thomas replied: “Nice to meet you, too.” Then there was silence. Thomas was watching the people running up to the platform and boarding the train. When the loud train whistle sounded, Thomas flinched. Joe pretended not to notice this, and instead tried to break the silence again. “What brings you to the train station this afternoon?”

Thomas contemplated his reply, and after a while he said, “Just need to get away.” The old man nodded, although he wasn’t sure Thomas even noticed, because he was still staring in the direction of the train platform. The hands in his front sweatshirt pocket seemed to be quivering or fidgeting, it was hard to tell which, but Thomas seemed on edge. “Is there something bothering you that you feel you need to get away from?” The old man asked. Thomas was clearly uncomfortable, as anyone would be when a stranger asks such questions, but the old man never hesitated nor apologized for interfering. Thomas replied, “I guess you could say that.”
The old man noticed his sweatshirt was from the local university. “Do you go to school there?” Thomas glanced down at his sweatshirt and then finally over at the old man. “Yeah,” he said.

“Done with classes for the week?”

“I mean, yeah, but it doesn’t matter anyway.”

“Why not?”

“It just doesn’t. School is pointless.”

“Why is that?”

“I don’t know. I’m not really good at anything, and I just don’t care enough. Too much pressure.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way.”

“Yup.”

The train on the opposite side of the platform began to depart, and the whistle startled Thomas once again. The old man wondered if Thomas was planning on buying a ticket or if he already had one. He also wondered why he chose to stand next to this bench instead of on the platform or inside of the train station. “Are you going to go home to see family, then?” The old man persisted. Thomas began to kick some of the rocks on the ground, fidgeting now with his feet just as much as his hands. “No, I don’t really have one.”

The old man felt sad for Thomas. How heartbreaking it must be to feel like you have no one. “You don’t have anyone you can go to? Who takes care of you?” Thomas continued moving rocks around and looking at the ground while he spoke. “I mean, I technically have a family, I guess. We just aren’t close. My mom passed away a couple of years ago, and my dad has been really cold to me ever since. I live with him and he pays for school and everything, but
we don’t really talk.” The pain in Thomas’s voice was evident.

“I’m very sorry to hear that,” was all the old man could think to say. “Yeah,” Thomas replied, “it’s all good.” The old man watched him carefully, trying to figure him out. If he had no family to go to and didn’t care much for school, where was he trying to go? “Well, there are lots of people that don’t have good families, and that’s okay. There are always people that care about you. I’m sure you’ve got friends or a girlfriend that are there for you when you’re feeling low.” The old man said this with a hint of hopefulness in his voice. He wanted Thomas to say “yes,” that he did. He wanted so badly for this boy, who had clearly had so many hardships, to sound happy about something—to be hopeful of something.

But again, Thomas shook his head. “No girlfriend. And my friends at school are different; we aren’t really close like that or anything.”

_How, then, could you consider them friends_, the old man wondered. Everyone in this world needs at least one friend they can go to when they need help. Otherwise, what’s the point? Thomas was checking his watch, which made the old man think he already had a departure time decided. “What time’s your train leaving?” He asked. Thomas shrugged, “Don’t know yet.”

The old man was skeptical of Thomas’s situation. He decided it was time for him to go buy his own ticket. “Thomas, would you mind giving me a hand?” He asked, standing up slowly and grabbing his cane. “I need to get up there and buy my ticket, but those platform steps are pretty steep.” Thomas politely obliged and helped the old man up. They walked slowly to the steps, and Thomas helped him climb them, all the while still looking at the ground. The old man went up to the ticket machine and mumbled about technology and how confusing it all was. Thomas watched him struggle with the touch screen and finally offered to help him with it. “When’s the next train going north of here?” The old man asked.
“3:11 p.m.,” Thomas replied after checking the list on the screen.

“Perfect, I’ll take that one. Thank you.”

“Round trip or one way?”

“One way is fine. I’ll figure out the rest when I get where I’m going.”

Thomas put the old man’s credit card in the machine and printed the tickets and the receipt. “Thank you very much,” he said. “No problem,” Thomas replied, handing him back all of his things. They walked over to another bench on the platform, and the old man sat down. This time, Thomas sat down next to him. “Don’t you need to buy a ticket too?” He asked Thomas. Thomas said no, that he’d figure it out. They sat there quietly for a few minutes, but Thomas was still noticeably uncomfortable. Meanwhile, a young mother with two small children strode past them, and the younger of the two little girls dropped the toy she was carrying. Seeing this happen, Thomas got up and quickly picked up the toy. He caught up to them, and returned the toy to the little girl. “Oh, thank you so much,” the mother said happily. “That would’ve made for a very long ride home. What do you say, Abby?” Thomas looked down at the little girl; she was smiling and hiding her face behind her toy. “Thank you,” Abby said, and Thomas smiled in reply.

He walked back over to the bench with the old man.

“Did you catch up to them?” He asked.

“Yeah, the mom was really nice.”

The old man nodded, “Well, it’s a good thing you were there to return her toy. I’m sure the little one is very happy,” the old man said with a smile, and he asked again if Thomas planned on buying a ticket. Thomas said no, not yet. “Well, aren’t your friends going
to think it’s strange that you’ve gone missing all afternoon to sit at a train station?” Thomas was sitting with his shoulders slouched, looking forward at nothing in particular. “Nah, no one will even notice.” That can’t be true, the old man thought, someone always notices! The clock ticked closer and closer to 3:11, and both Thomas and the old man were very aware of it. “If you’re going somewhere for a while, why don’t you have any luggage?” Thomas asked.

“I’ll be staying with family, so I have some of my things at their houses already, you know, from previous visits,” the old man said. Thomas nodded, and then looked back up at the big clock on the wall. The old man looked at Thomas, and he could see that Thomas was sweating and his eyes were watery. He looked forward again and away from the old man. “I’m very excited to see my family,” the old man said. “They’ve helped me through some terrible times, and it’s been a while since I’ve seen them.” Thomas nodded, clearly preoccupied, but the old man continued. “I went through some rough patches a few years back. If it hadn’t been for them, I don’t know where I’d be right now.” Thomas looked at him, his eyebrows furrowed, requesting more of an explanation. “I didn’t want any help—thought I could handle all of my problems on my own. But they were there for me,” he said. “They got me to talk to them and eventually to talk to someone else—someone with more experience, I mean. They made me want to get better, and now here we are.” Thomas was still looking forward, but was certainly paying attention. “I mean, look at me! I’m a ray of sunshine, ain’t I?” The old man chuckled and Thomas gave a half-hearted smile.

“The point is, people care—even when you think they don’t. You’re never alone, you know. I think it’s important that people know that.” The old man saw a tear run down Thomas’s face then, but Thomas said nothing. The old man took a deep breath and glanced over at the clock again. Thomas spoke up, “Sometimes you are alone. That’s just how it is. There are people who have no one.” He sounded more bored with this statement than upset. He
wiped another tear from his cheek and cleared his throat. “No. Believe me. We are never alone. Even if it’s just some nosy old man at a train station—someone cares.” Thomas looked at him, his uncomfortable expression molding into a sad one.

“Thomas,” the old man said. “You were never planning on getting on a train, were you?” Thomas turned to the old man, clearly taken aback. The old man looked forward at the tracks, and then back at Thomas, shaking his head slowly. Thomas began to cry quietly, and the old man put a hand on his back. All of the busy people in the train station continued about their day, texting and calling and rushing about. They paid no attention to the young man crying on the bench, just like they had paid no attention to the young man standing silently on the side of the tracks just moments earlier. The old man watched people go about their business, and wondered how people could so easily ignore each other. How could anyone walk past someone who obviously needs help?

After a few minutes, the intercom announced the momentary arrival of the 3:11 p.m. train, headed northbound. Thomas sat with his head in his hands. The old man grabbed his ticket and handed it to Thomas. Thomas looked confused. “Take this, and go home. Go see someone you can talk to.” Thomas seemed as though he wanted to object, but he took the ticket, thanking the old man. When the train arrived, Thomas was sitting on a bench on the platform. It wasn’t until the train was fully stopped that he stood up and approached the tracks. He turned around to face the bench again, “Thank you, Joe. Thank you so much,” Thomas smiled, still choking back tears. Then Thomas stepped onto the train, and, within a few minutes, the train was gone. The old man sat there, hoping that Thomas would find happiness and praying that he uses it to help someone else.

The mother of the two children walked past again, this time with an older gentleman. The man was carrying luggage in one hand and the younger girl in the other. The little girl waved at the old
man as they walked past, and he waved back with a bright smile.

On the train, Thomas sat against the window, his mind racing. He began to feel calm, a feeling that had been eluding him for a long time. He handed over his ticket and pulled out his phone. He hadn’t looked at it in hours. There were a couple of texts from friends, among other social media notifications. He ignored them all and called home. “Dad? It’s me. I’m coming home for the weekend if that’s okay. I really need to talk to you.” Thomas’s dad assured him that that would be fine and that he would pick him up from the train station as soon as he arrived. His father asked if he was okay, hearing the shakiness in Thomas’s voice. Thomas assured him that he would be fine. Then Thomas put his phone away, and watched out the window as the landscape raced past him. The world around him no longer felt still—everything was moving forward—and Thomas felt the sudden desire to begin moving with it.
A Taste of Home

Art by Amanda Davin
The Radio

Olivia Quinci

Like a lot of people, when Melanie went to sleep, she had plenty of thoughts that would whirl in her head. They would pester her like aunts at a family reunion. *Should I wear my green or grey shirt tomorrow?* *I should’ve had everything laid out already, because I know that I’m going to wake up ten minutes late again.* Some thoughts though, were louder than others. Instead of echoes from a stand-up lawn table, they would appear to her warm and misty, like someone very close had nestled a whisper inside her ear canal. They were sudden and quick, and she could never make out what they said because of the jolt that they gave her. That was until, finally, one night there was one that she could understand.

*The Radio.*

Her eyes shot open. The ceiling above her was a haze between charcoal and black, only lit by the hint of blue moonlight from her window. She lay there for a couple of minutes to decide if she really was going to continue her secret ritual. She turned her gaze to the alarm clock on her nightstand: 11:33. If she spent just half an hour, she figured it would not be too much of a waste of her time. She got out of her bed, put on her slippers, and groped for the first sweater she could find in the dark.

It was a long and careful trek to the attic, Melanie knew that it would not be easy to open the door from the ceiling and ascend the creaky stairs without waking the rest of her family. At last though, the time came, and she immersed herself in the chill from just outside the thin walls, the musty smell of ancient artifacts like her mother’s wedding dress, and all the dusty home videos in VCRs. She snuck through a narrow hallway made by dilapidated piles of scrapbooks and Christmas decorations to find a small box resting against the wall. She could barely see the dials, but she knew what it was once she had seen the metal from the antenna gleaming in the moonlight.

The AM radio first belonged to her grandfather, who had obtained it
when he first began his job at the National Guard. She remembered
the first Thanksgiving that he had shown it to her, right after her
brother, Tommy, had pushed her in a football game that made her
scrape her knee. “Ah, who needs them anyway?” he said when he
found her sitting on the front porch in a pout. “Here, I got
something much better that we can do.” They went up staircase
after staircase, and out onto the same balcony that Melanie was
headed to now, the small landing that jutted out from the attic
window in which she could barely do more than turn around.

“And that guy’s talkin’ all the way from Arizona!” he exclaimed, as
crisp as the cool November air and as soothing as the leaves that
were wistfully swaying from the trees. Melanie was in absolute
amazement. “And people can talk from even farther away than
that. Why, I once spoke with a guy all the way in Japan!” The idea
that she could reach out to so far away, to such exciting and
mysterious people, tantalized and frightened her at the same tim.
The radio soon became a staple to every visit that Melanie had w ith
her grandfather, and he was always just as happy to share it w ith
her. She knew that he always had liked her in a way that was
different from her siblings and cousins. “Smart as a whip.” He
would tell the family at the dinner table, “Don’t get in her way!” It
had been three years since he died. Melanie supposed that she
was feeling especially nostalgic that night.

She was tensed up and focused by the chill of the night air as she
set up the radio. The breeze pierced at her nose and watered her
eyes. She fumbled in her fingerless gloves and exposed digits that
were slowly growing numb, but at last she flipped the switch. The
radio started with a whirr that opened a thousand doors. All the
memories of searching through static came back to her. A lot of days
she would find nothing, but they would melt from memory at the
sparse moment she heard a voice or any sound coming from the
speakers. She hardly knew if tonight was going to be a lucky night,
but she hoped. The sudden urge that woke her felt out of character.
She wondered why. Some Freudian, subconscious signal? Fate?
Melanie heard the numbers inch out of the speaker in a genderless, monotone voice. *A numbers station! How exciting!* The numbers stations always used to unnerve Melanie as a child, but with the added nuance of adolescence, she grew fonder. Now they had to be her favorite kind of transmission. They were always so mysterious in their simplicity. She would form all sorts of hypotheses over whom the numbers were for and why. Melanie looked up into the night sky and just listened. The numbers became the perfect soundtrack to the spilling of stars that she watched above: an unfathomable chaos, dripping out and echoing like a leaky faucet to lead on a poor listener, always anticipating a conclusion that will never come.

A wave of static attacked the broadcast, rising up to the point that Melanie could no longer hear the androgynous speaker. After a few seconds, the voice of a man, low and gravelly, emerged from the crashing tide.

*There is a world out there that we do not understand. There are forces… dark forces…that are beyond our perception. We must be made aware. I repeat, we must be made aware….*

Melanie wondered if this was some kind of joke. She had never heard anything like this coming out from her radio.

*But not everyone must be made aware. Most people cannot understand beyond what they are told to understand. But there are some who can, and if you’re out there, I am trying to reach you now. Take this as your calling. Do you ever feel there is more out there than your current parameters of reason? Do you ever wonder what is left to be discovered by science? By philosophy or faith? Do you ever find that whisper in your head, telling you that there is more? Demanding that you find “more”?*

The last question put Melanie back. *Whisper* was the very word
that threw her off. How did he know that it was a whisper?

32.889990, -113.658175

The man’s message was brief, and the static soon turned the transmission back to the monotone numbers. Melanie turned the radio off but not her reeling mind. A week of that reeling passed, and one morning her parents woke up to find her gone from her bed and her car gone from the driveway.
For the third time that day, the sailor vomits over the side of the railing. She watches as the remains of the meager meal she ate for lunch are swept away by the boat’s wake. The sailor hauls herself upright and frees the tiller from its lock. She briefly considers going below deck to make herself some food to replace what she’s just lost but decides against it. It’s not like she’ll be able to keep it down anyway. She unclips her water bottle from its holder and takes a long draught—the least she can do is try to stay hydrated.

The sailor clutches the bottle between her hands, closes her eyes, and tilts her face toward the sun. The sun beats down harshly—her face burns, but she can’t bring herself to care enough to do something about it. The only clouds in the sky are a dark mass along the horizon to the east—the remnants of yesterday’s storm, a storm that feels like a lifetime ago.

A strong gust of wind causes something in the rigging to rattle, and the sailor reluctantly pries open her eyes to see that the jib halyard has come loose from the winch and is rapidly snaking forward. She reluctantly pops the tiller back into the lock, double checks that her harness is secure, and quickly makes her way towards the mast. She needs to get the halyard before it gets to the top of the mast and ends up skied—that’s the last thing she needs. She quickly climbs up the first two mast stairs and reaches for the loose line. It takes a few tries, but she huffs out a sigh in relief when she finally grabs hold of it.

She returns to the deck, halyard securely in her hand. She looks out across the bow, admiring the open water before her eyes fall upon the bundle strapped to the foredeck. Five feet and four inches wrapped up in the spare mainsail.

She vomits again.
Marianne hadn’t sailed in a long time; too much time on land had robbed her of her sea legs and left her apprehensive about returning to the open water. She suggested they start slowly, that they stick to the rivers and inlets, but Katie was insistent that it be the ocean.

“I don’t want to just fly to the Bahamas,” Katie said, “I want to sail.”

“You don’t know how to sail,” Marianne responded, fighting the urge to roll her eyes. Katie was vibrant, electric, magnetic, and horribly naïve. “Besides, what reason do we have for going to the Bahamas? We could always just do a weekend or something up the river.”

“But you do know how to sail,” Katie huffed, “And I don’t want to do some half-assed vacation. We’ll rent a sailboat and go for a week. It’ll be great. We’ve both been working so much that we haven’t gone on a vacation in ages.”

Marianne shook her head, “I don’t think that’s a good idea. I haven’t gone sailing since before college. We’d be a lot safer if we just stuck to, like, the Intracoastal Waterway or something.”

Katie crossed her arms. “No,” she told her, “if what you’ve told me is true and all those trophies you keep in the closet are real, then there’s no need for whatever the boat equivalent of training wheels is. We’re going to the Bahamas.”

“Katie,” Marianne said slowly, “To get to the Bahamas, you have to cross the Gulf Stream, and crossing the Gulf Stream is not something you can just do. What if we run aground on a coral reef? What if there’s a storm? What if the rigging all goes to hell and we get trapped in the current? There’s so much that could go wrong. There are people that plan to cross for months and then never do because they can’t get good enough crossing weather.”

Katie took Marianne’s hands in her own. “Listen,” she said gently,
“I know you’re scared. I know you haven’t done this in years, but I trust you. And I think it’ll be good for you. I think this is something you need. I think there’s a part of you that belongs to the water, whether you like it or not.”

Marianne narrowed her eyes at Katie, “Fine.”

Katie jumped for joy and informed her that she had already rented them a sailboat. They would depart in two days’ time, Katie told her, and that she should call into work and finally use some of the vacation time she’d accumulated.

The sailor wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, grimacing at the residual burn in her throat from the bile. She turns her back to the bow and makes her way back to the cockpit. She picks up her water bottle and drains the last of it, hoping to wash away the rotten taste lingering on her tongue. She doesn’t succeed. Now she’s left with the taste of stomach acid and the too-hard water from the tanks.

The 32-foot Bayfield they rented for the trip is beautiful. From the dark green canvas to the teak decks to the butterfly hatches on the bow—it’s like the boat is lifted straight out of the sailor’s dreams and into reality, or perhaps her nightmares. SS Theodosia is the boat’s name, and the sailor barks out a bitter laugh at how horribly fitting the name has come to be. Lost at sea on a boat named Theodosia.

The sailor wonders if their fate would have been the same had the ship had a different name. Probably not. The sea is her own mistress, and humanity falls at her knees.
The morning of their departure, the water was still, and the clear skies were painted a vibrant pink as dawn broke. Marianne felt something in her gut turn, and she could almost remember a rhyme her father used to tell her. She cursed and tried to focus on it. She almost had it when Katie called up to her from below deck, telling her that they needed to leave soon and breaking her from her reverie. The charts indicated that it would take them about six or seven hours to cross the Gulf Stream, provided everything went smoothly. There was a coral reef that they would have to be sure to avoid, but Marianne was sure that it wouldn’t be too difficult. Just a slight course adjustment and they’d go right around it.

Katie came above deck, dressed casually in a bikini with a shawl wrapped around her. She moved to stand behind Marianne, peeking over her shoulder at the chart she held. Marianne leaned back into her touch.

“Hey babe, you ready?” Katie asked her.

Marianne sighed and set the chart aside, “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

“I’ll take what I can get,” Katie laughed, pressing a quick kiss to Marianne’s cheek. She helped Marianne cast off, and, before long, the two were on their way. Marianne sat at the tiller, and Katie sat on the deck, her legs hanging over the hull. The ship cut smoothly through the waves, and Marianne could feel herself relaxing more and more the farther they got from shore. Her eyes slipped closed….

…And then abruptly snapped open when Katie shrieked. Marianne’s head whipped around toward her, only to realize that Katie was laughing at dolphins that were swimming alongside them.

“Do you see this, Mari? Dolphins!”

Marianne laughed, “Yeah, I see. Be careful not to lean too far over
though, babe. Don’t want you going overboard or anything.”

Katie gave Marianne a mock salute, “Aye aye, captain.”

Marianne rolled her eyes and turned her attention to the open water before them. Spray came over the bow and misted over her face. Marianne turned behind her to grab a towel from the aft railing, frowning slightly when she noticed the clouds forming along the horizon.

As the sailor takes a deep breath, a rogue wave crashes over the bow. The abrupt inhalation of seawater sends her into a coughing fit, and she falls to her knees. Before long, she’s heaving once more, and her whole body is wracked with tremors from the force of it all.

She’s not sure how much time she spends convulsing—it could be five minutes or five hours. When it finally stops, she collapses and rolls onto her back way from the mess she made, arms spread wide. Her head lolls to the side, and, just past her fingertips, she sees the chart she had discarded yesterday. It’s drenched, and the ink has run until the whole thing is a soggy, unreadable mess. The sailor wonders why something that’s so crucial to navigating a ship is so susceptible to the elements. It seems awfully counter-productive. One storm is all it takes to ruin it.

The storm came out of nowhere. One minute, Katie was leaning against Marianne, her face tucked in Marianne’s neck, and the next, the sky had opened up over the two of them. Marianne scrambled to her feet, joined shortly thereafter by Katie; neither had noticed how quickly the clouds on the horizon had snuck up on them. Marianne quickly grabbed two harnesses out of the locker underneath the seat, handing one to Katie while donning the other. Once it was on, Marianne took hold of the tiller, and
Katie scrambled to grab everything that wasn’t waterproof to throw below deck. She could sort it out later.

Marianne could barely see Katie’s figure through the torrential downpour as she fought to keep the tiller still. The sea had turned into a choppy mess in a matter of minutes, and Marianne was reluctant to lock the tiller because the sudden storm most likely was throwing them off course. If she locked it now, they would probably stay that way, and it was anyone’s guess as to where they would end up.

Katie was bent over to throw it all down the companionway, and as soon as everything was safe from the rain, she slammed the hatch shut. A violent gust of wind caught the mainsail as Katie straightened up. Marianne felt like everything was moving in slow motion. Katie turned back to face Marianne at the exact same moment that the boom swung over the railing and toward the center of the boat. Metal met bone, and Katie was thrown overboard. Marianne screamed.

Marianne locked the tiller. She threw the locker underneath the seat open once more and yanked out a rope. One end was tied to the railing and the other to her harness. Her eyes found Katie’s yellow shawl. And then she jumped over the side.

A wave crashed over her head, dunking her briefly. She kicked out fiercely and found the surface. Marianne had never been happier to be a strong swimmer than in that moment. She snapped her head around, looking desperately. She saw a flash of yellow out of the corner of her eye. Katie’s shawl. She had to get to Katie.

“Katie!” Marianne cried out, swimming toward where she had seen the yellow only seconds ago.

Another wave came smashing into Marianne, and with it, something solid. When Marianne found the surface once more, she saw what
had hit her. It was a body that she knew almost as well as her own. It was Katie. Covered in blood and seemingly unconscious, but it was Katie. She sent up a prayer, thanking whatever God might be up there. Katie was everything to her. She frantically clipped her harness onto Katie’s, grabbed hold of the rope tethering her to the ship, and hauled.

When Marianne reached the boat, she unhooked Katie’s harness from her own and attached the cord to the railing. It was crude, but it kept Katie’s head above water as Marianne hauled herself up over the edge. As soon as she was back on deck, she pulled Katie over the rail. She laid Katie out on the cockpit seat. Marianne leaned in close to get a look at Katie. The rain was falling on Katie’s face directly and had already washed away most of the blood. Katie’s face was unrecognizable. Her skull was caved in on the left side, and her neck was twisted at an angle that Marianne hadn’t noticed earlier. Katie was dead.

For the first time that day, the sailor threw up.

Her eyes are glassy as she looks out over the water. The color’s changed slightly, and she thinks that she might be close to the coral reef she tried to avoid. She’s still sprawled out from when she fell on the deck earlier. She’s too exhausted to do anything. She’s nothing but dead weight at this point. A bird circles above. Something splashes next to the hull, and she hears the cry of a dolphin. She thinks of Katie.

Of Katie giggling and splashing in the water. Of the diamond ring in her luggage, a size seven, which she had bought the day before yesterday, the day before they set out on the trip. Of Katie falling asleep against her. Of Katie laying across the seat, bloody and broken. Of screaming until her voice was gone. Of realizing that Katie was gone. Of pulling herself up, going below deck, and
pulling out a spare sail. Of the two more times she vomited while she struggled to wrap Katie in it. Of the way Katie always claimed she was too good at compartmentalizing things. Of lashing Katie’s body to the bow. Of the way her hands shook as she struggled to knot the ropes securing her. Of the guilt that roiled in her gut and brought about another wave of nausea. Of knowing that Katie’s death was her fault.

She feels the boat hit the reef more than she hears it, the sound of fiberglass splintering seems so far away. She knows that she should probably do something like get the inflatable lifeboat out. There’s a whole list of things she should do in case of emergencies like this. Instead, she stays where she is, laid out across the very cockpit seat on which she had laid Katie. The vessel creaks and shudders, and then she’s rolling over towards the railing. She thinks that she should probably grab onto it. She lets herself continue falling until she’s over the side.

She slips under the water, too tired to fight. Water fills her lungs. The last thing the sailor sees as her eyes drift shut is a hint of yellow. The sea is her own mistress, and she brought the sailor to her knees and then down even further. The embrace of the ocean is cold, but sinking into the reef feels like coming home.
Ipseity
Art by Xander Opiyo
The Longest Commute

Soo Kyoung (Annie) Lee

There are six empty seats on the bus, but it would still be a risk, she had decided. She had decided before she even got on the bus while standing in the corner by herself at the station: still a risk to sit down next to someone. God forbid that they start talking to her, then social conventions will her to turn her face toward their face, and she’s forced to read even a letter off of their chapped, grimy lips. Or a bump in the road forces their elbows together, and she’s made to feel the foreign vibration of another soul. What would be separating them, really, but blood and skin and cloth? Peel back just three layers, and her soul would be bared to the world.

It would most definitely be a risk.

A baby eyes her from his cradle. Probably wondering why the girl’s ear is a shriveled-up walnut at the side of her head instead of a smooth curve like his mother’s. Sometimes she wishes she was also blind. That would make things a whole lot easier. Yeah, fuck you, Sonny. You should’ve shot my eyes out too while you were at it. But no, he must’ve known. He must’ve known that doing so would have ended up doing her a favor in the future, and that’s why he ran as far away as possible. Coward. It was his fault that this dumb baby was staring her down. Everything was his fault.

If you only have one ear, or at least one working ear, then there’s an ear for words to go in, but not one for words to go out. So what do those words do? The old lady’s hacking and yacking on a five-hour bus ride; Brenda’s crying over the phone in a public restroom; your doctor’s graceless delivery as he breaks the news that you’ve got chlamydia; what do they do?

They fester. Like white smoke in the jar of a recently blown out candle: let us out, they fester, we’re dying. But you can’t let them out because then the whole room would smell like dying candle, so instead they swirl around and suffocate the wick and the wax and
everything else that makes the candle a candle. So the candle loses a bit of its Cashmere Woods, Morning Roast, and Holiday Sage with every fester until the candle isn’t even a candle anymore. And so you go crazy, suffocating, choking, screaming Where did my candle go?, Why did you do this to me?, How did things end up like this?, and then you shoot the working ear off yourself and the entire world goes silent.

Peace at last… at last…

She had both ears when he told her that he loved her for the first time. In and out—she didn’t even think about it. She loved that he loved her, and that was the end of it. The words festered, not within her, but around her, creating a cloud of love that coated every one of his words with love before they could reach her ears raw.

Two months later, he tells her that she’s a baby. She hears that she’s innocent, pure, charmingly dopey. She falls in love all over again. By the ear, she’s pulled onto her bed, which was to become their bed, and he undresses her with a clumsy eagerness. Two layers. He tells her that it’s hard to believe that she loves him if she’s afraid. You don’t gotta be afraid, her ears tell her, I would never hurt you. He undresses himself next and lies on top of her and kisses her body in places that had never known another person before. Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid. One layer.

He is too eager so she bleeds. It hurts, she says, but she doesn’t tell him to stop, so he doesn’t stop, so his movements grow harder. So her words, in and out, in and out, in and out… .

And the bed springs creak for months after that. An eight-month-long bus ride that has them bumping elbows more often than she liked. Two working ears but the most deaf she had ever been in her entire life.
No one can touch you if you don’t listen. But it’s hard not to listen when you have ears. People get mad. They know that you can hear them but are choosing not to listen on purpose, and more often than not, they take it personally. Sonny, for instance, got so personal that he showed me a secret that he had never shown anybody else—his gun. He showed me how it works, too.

So, people think that ears are an invitation to tell you anything without permission. The old lady coughs and tells you she’s dying. The child giggles on the swings from a place that seems so far now and reminds you that you’re dying. The swing is dying. The mulch is dying. The hopscotch, monkey bars, and slide are dying. The playground is dead.

All of this goes on within one’s head, but it makes the world so much louder. You are continually touched without permission. Voices fester whether you want them to or not, and your head becomes a candle jar. You cannot fight it. You cannot fight it. A hopeful flame and the wax incensed with you used to battle against this festering, but their efforts have since burnt out. And so you submit, fuse with the voices, and disappear into the air of everyone who’s ever touched you.

There’s no difference between what one hears and what one reads. And when one can’t hear, one gets really good at reading. She had to be careful then, and she must be careful now.

The couple beside her on the bus begins to converse, and she’s taken back to the outside of a movie theater with Sonny. Snow is falling, and the night is chilling over their cheeks, but they’re in a heated argument about the ending of “Inception” (he wins—Leo is dreaming, and there is no happy ending).
She turns to the window, and an imposing billboard threatens her with the latest pick-two deal at McDonald’s. It’s 4 a.m., and she finds Sonny slumped in the fast-food chain at the corner of their block. His phone blinks with 12 waiting messages; she’d left him 11. The first of many confusing miscalculations that never made sense in her brain, but Sonny explained to her thoroughly and convincingly.

Then her—their—old apartment complex appears through the glass. It comes and goes faster than it should, because what flashes to her mind is not a moment but an era. She watches from afar as her foolish past surrenders itself to Sonny.

He’s an engineer—systematic, practical—so she takes down her cute string lights (it’s a waste of power), takes up meal-prepping (it’s more efficient), and trades in her crossword puzzles for Sudoku (numbers are just more meaningful).

He is removed from his family, so she removes her childhood photo albums from plain sight and instead erects framed pictures of her and Sonny: the two dancing in Times Square during Christmas, the two picking apples in matching flannels, the two eating ice cream while swinging at the park.

But now, from afar, she only sees one person.

Maybe the playground isn’t dead. But that doesn’t matter, does it? If something isn’t dead, but you think it’s dead, then it is dead. Your mind trumps reality. The reality might’ve been that Sonny knew this before I did.

But my head was busy falling for that festering smoke. It’s mesmerizing, the way it ripples and undulates against its cage as
if it knows that there's a way out, just that someone isn't letting it. Is that why Sonny only shot off one ear? It's worse than being deaf, I think, to hear something and then not know how to let it out, because you've been so trained to retain everything that someone else says to you.

Now her eyes turn to her feet. A piece of bubblegum lies discarded on the floor of the bus: stepped, tripped, stomped on, over and over, until its signature pink had disappeared into the grubby black floor.

Suddenly, she's taken back—she's 22 again. It was around this time that Sonny ran away from her life, but he did not leave without first robbing her of her balance. Bus conversations trickle in through her one ear and collect madly into a vessel, which was already festering with Sonny's parting words. Her fingers tremble as they clench the brown paper bag containing the handgun she just bought, and, out of nervous anticipation for her night plans, the gum that she had been gnawing at ferociously for the past hour falls out of her mouth, abandoned to disappear into the grubby black floor.

But it's still pink on the inside. Twenty-seven now, she closes her eyes, and a trembling finger reaches up to the reconstructed mess hanging onto the side of her head.

She can hear Sonny telling her that this has all been her fault. As she's bent over against a wall, crying, and her ear is weeping profuse blood that she's been trying to shove back into the wound, it is all her fault. Everything is her fault. Then he leaves her to herself, and the pile of blood beneath her, and the blame with her face on it.

But being trained and being are entirely different things. Her
fingers slowly trace the walnut ear, the one that she shot off herself. *This has all been your fault.*

And then a strange sensation of regret threatens to shatter her entire being. Not because she can't hear anymore—no, it was never that. But because if you took a scalpel and dissected that pathetic glob of gum to pieces, you'd find it still pink on the inside.
Car Wash 1976

Art by Kanisha Clark
No Contest
Joseph Woodward

Hank flicked on the lights. The bedroom looked the same as it had when he had left that morning. Their bedroom—no, mine, my bedroom—did not yet know the results of today’s arraignment. Nolo contendere. She always had hated arguments. If it had known, the lacy bed skirt would be gone, so too would the second night stand. For a long time, Hank simply stood there in the doorway of his bedroom, rubbing his eyes with his palms until they began to ache. Jenny’s actually gone. Locked up, he thought with a mixture of relief, despair, and a thousand other unnamed emotions. Eleven years of marriage. Eleven years of the good, the bad, and the terrifying. And now he was alone in the house. No kids. After the first five years, they faced the facts and stopped talking about children. Red eyes, made redder by his scrubbing palms, stared into the closet mirror. Heavy salt-and-pepper stubble stared back at him. His razor was in the trash. No point in shaving without anyone’s face to worry about scratching. The stubble also did a passible job of hiding the deep scratches and the knife wound on his neck. Hank shrugged off his singled-breasted suit and threw it onto the growing pile of clothes in the closet. The problem with never helping your wife do the laundry is that you are shit out of luck if she ever gets sent away.

Kicking off his shoes, Hank fell into bed. Exhausted, he shut his eyes and tried to finally put an end to that miserable day. It was no use; he was simply too tired to sleep. His body begged for rest, but his mind refused to cooperate. Reaching the point when his body had accustomed itself to sleep deprivation, it now ran on adrenaline, so that he felt both weary and excited. With a sigh, Hank gave up and turned on the TV. He watched an infomercial for several minutes before realizing it was not a TV show. He flipped through the channels until landing on House Hunters International. He hated this show. Jenny always made him watch it with her. She said that, one day, they would have enough money to be like the people on the show. He told her it was stupid. Six episodes later, Hank turned to the news.
“An accident involving multiple cars occurred earlier today on the New Jersey Turnpike. At least two fatalities have been confirmed.”

Hank’s house was not far from a section of the turnpike, and out of morbid curiosity he wondered if the crash had occurred anywhere near him. Several frantic knocks on his front door violently pulled Hank out of his daze.

“Coming, coming,” he grunted, as he slowly made his way to the door. As he opened the door, the reporter’s words floated out of the bedroom and to him.

“One of the vehicles involved in the crash was a prison transport bus. One of the prisoners on the bus was Jenny Malone, the woman convicted of killing her neighbor Patricia Lewis, as well as the attempted murder of her husband, Hank. Reports say that several prisoners escaped from the bus after the crash. As of now, it is unknown whether Jenny Malone was one of the escaped prisoners.”

Hank could have answered that.

“Hey, baby.” Her voice was nervous and casual at the same time. Her jumpsuit was torn and dirty, and she had twigs in her hair and a bad cut on her forehead. She still looked beautiful. Shivering uncontrollably in the baggy prison jumpsuit, she also looked small and weak, yet still terrifying. In her quavering hand was the prison transport guard’s gun.

The adrenaline pumping through Hank’s veins was now replaced by ice water.

“Jenny… y—you have a gun.” The statement also seemed a question. She looked up at him, and her eyes became alert.

“It’s not for you,” she said. “I… I’m not here to kill you. I just need
to make you....” She bit her lower lip and frowned, looking inwardly. “…I need to make you listen. You never listen.” Hank backed away from her and into the house. It was not an invitation for her to enter, but she did so anyway. The light in the hallway revealed a smear of ketchup on Hank’s cheek. “Hank, you have some ketchup on your face.” She licked the thumb of her gun-free hand and moved to wipe the ketchup away, standing on tiptoes to reach his face. Hank jerked back, bumping up against the wall.

“Please,” Hank said. “You need to get out of here. The police are probably looking for you.” Hank stared at the gun. For the moment, it was pointed at the ground. But with Jenny, that could change. “Please, get away from me!”

Jenny’s lips trembled, and she shook her head several times. “Don’t, don’t say that. This is our house. We are a family.” She spoke the words rapidly, as if said any more slowly they would lose their rationality. “A husband and wife can tell each other anything. And I need to tell you why I did what I did.” She paused to search Hank’s face, to see if her words had any effect on him. They did. He was near the point of sobbing, feeling at the scar on his neck. “I didn’t do it to hurt you. I did it because I love you. I did it to protect you, to protect you from her!” The last word was pure venom.

The sounds of sirens made Jenny jerk around; she raised her gun but did not point it at anything specifically. Two officers jumped out of their squad car as others arrived at the scene. They saw the gun. Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Like stepping on bubblewrap, only louder. Five rounds to the chest drop a 100-pound person easily. And Jenny was dead before she hit the ground.

The officers were saying something to Hank, but he did not hear them. His ears were ringing. A fine mist of Jenny’s blood covered Hank, especially his hand, which he had reached toward her to pull her out of the way. His wedding band was covered in blood.
He knelt down beside her body and took her hand. They had removed her wedding ring when they took her away. Hank slipped his ring onto her thumb and then kissed her hand. “I know, baby,” he whispered. “I know.”

More police came, as well as news vans and an unnecessary ambulance. And all the while, Hank knelt there holding the hand of the woman he still loved.
Southern Baptist Church

Art by Kanisha Clark
Contributors’ Notes

Jacque Buck is a graduating senior and Human Services major. She hopes to become a research assistant before attending graduate school. She is a Delaworean and enjoys collecting records, petting various animals, and hiking.

Stella Castor is a sophomore Women and Gender Studies & Sociology double major and an Honors student. She considers herself to be an activist and a poet and believes the power of the story can trump almost anything.

Kanisha Clark is a graduating senior and a Biological Sciences major. She is enjoys all forms of art but has a keen interest in capturing truth through photography. After graduation she plans on doing a gap year in Johannesburg.

Amanda Dawn Davin is a senior Wildlife Conservation major and Marine Science minor with a passion for the arts and photography. She enjoys sharing adventures with her husband, family, and friends.

Jonay Desire is a sophomore majoring in Criminal Justice with a concentration in Law and Society and a minor in Legal Studies. She is involved in many organizations on campus. She also enjoys shopping, learning, eating, and going to church.

Bridget Dolan is a senior Astronomy major with minors in Journalism and Writing. In her spare time, she enjoys making her own herbal tea blends, sailing, watching women’s hockey, and writing in the middle of the night.

Jasmine Edwards is a junior English and Women’s Studies double major. She is also an actress, figure skater, and winner of the 2017 Arak Award, who enjoys good movies and strong tea and hopes to attend graduate school in New York.
Bailee Formon is a junior Psychology and Cognitive Science double major, with minors in both Writing and Italian. She aspires to continue to write as often as possible while pursuing a career in Industrial–Organizational Psychology.

Alicia Fox is a senior Marketing major with minors in both Art and Advertising. Thinking creatively is a big part of her life, and she is looking forward to bringing that mindset into her full-time career after graduating.

Anthony Grubb is a senior Civil Engineering major from Dover, Delaware. Contrary to his major, he enjoys graphic design, photography, and cinematography, but art doesn’t pay the bills.

Monique Harmon is a junior who is passionate about God. She loves telling stories through video, audio, and interviews. She maintains a fashion blog “Mo Fashion, No Problems.” She loves expressing herself through various forms of writing.

A.E. Hennick is a graduating senior and English major. He is Delaware native and avid cinephile, who is simply making things up as he goes along.

Quader’a Henry is a junior and Africana Studies major. She enjoys writing poetry, meditating, laughing, and cooking. While busy, she knows that she will always find the time to write, sharing the breathings of her heart.

Rahsel Holland is a junior English and Public Policy double major. She is a Delawarean who is currently interning at Oak Knoll Books and aspires to become a publisher and possibly own a magazine label. This is her third year published in Caesura.
Oyinlola Isiaka is a junior with a double major in Operations Management and International Relations. She enjoys anything that deals with film, from writing to cinematography. She also has an odd love for watching tax and insurance commercials.

Soo Kyoung (Annie) Lee is a sophomore English major and Legal Studies minor from Delaware. As her studies more often have to do with technical/analytical writing, she always enjoys any chance to dabble in creative works.

Julia Lowndes is a sophomore English major from Lewes, Delaware. She loves capturing life through writing and taking photos. She enjoys music and crafts and hopes to study in Paris next year.

Grace McKenna is a junior triple Language major who also enjoys writing and reading in whatever free time she can find. She enjoys animals, nature, and telling stories around a campfire.

Nicole Morfitt is a senior English major. In her free time, she enjoys writing short stories and spending time with family and friends.

Kimberly Novak is a graduating senior and Art major with an Interactive Media minor. She is relocating to Denver, Colorado, where she plans to continue practicing photography and graphic design.

Xander Opiyo is a sophomore Visual Communications major from Bear, Delaware. He appreciates all types of art but has a primary interest in photography and film. He also enjoys playing the ukulele, listening to dope tunes, and wearing dark blue turtlenecks.
Judy Pelham is an undergraduate transfer student majoring in English after retiring from her career as a psychologist. She enjoys reading, writing, and painting and is excited about being able to pursue her lifelong goal of learning to write creatively.

Olivia Quinci is a sophomore English and Spanish double major, who loves writing, reading, and performing stories in both fiction and nonfiction. She likes podcasts, talking about music, and having time to think about what she is doing after graduation.

Leanna Smith is a junior English major with minors in Journalism, French, and Public Policy. Originally from New Jersey, she enjoys spending her free time people watching, destroying the patriarchy, and, of course, reading and writing.

Katie Spillan is a sophomore English and Criminal Justice double major with plans to go to law school after graduation. She is a Delawarean and enjoys reading, spending time with her sorority sisters, and playing with her two dogs.

Kat Steward is a Newark native and junior English major with minors in Biological Sciences and Educational Studies. She loves 19th-century literature and short stories and plans on talking about that for the rest of her life.

Kathleen Wilson is a junior English Major who is looking forward to her senior year and then the real world. She enjoys trips to various new places, being around her friends and dogs, and reading new books.

Joseph Woodward is a graduating senior and English major. Born and raised in Wilmington, Delaware, Joseph loves to read and write. He plans to write fantasy novels after he graduates.
Caesura

(si-zyur-ə) n. pl. -suras, -surae
In modern prosody: usually a rhetorical break in the flow of sound in the middle of a line of verse. Greek and Latin prosody: a break in the flow in the middle of sound in a verse by the ending of a word within a foot. Break, interruption. A pause making a rhythmic point of division in a melody.

Caesura is the University of Delaware English Department’s student Literary Annual. Work is submitted, selected, and edited by an all-student staff. All submissions are considered for publication anonymously.

Production Notes

The text of Caesura features the font family ITC Tiepolo, named after Italian artist Dominic Tiepolo and designed by AlphaOmega Typography’s Cynthia Hollandsworth Batty in 1987. Designers describe it as a sans serif font with serifs.

The font Chalet Comprimé Hong Kong Sixty and Hong Kong Seventy (numerals), two of ten varieties of the Chalet Comprimé family created by Delaware-based type foundry House Industries, was used for page titles and cover numerals.

The font Desdemona, an open face based on John F. Cumming’s c. 1886 font Quaint and designed in 1992 by David Berlow for Font Bureau, was used for the cover and title page word “Caesura,” the words that indicate section headings, and the caesura motif icon.

The cover photoillustration features pieces of four of the art entries— “Rainy Day Raindrops,” “Spirograph,” “Window,” and “Challenging the System.”

Three hundred copies of Caesura were printed on #70 Dotmar Cougar Natural text and #80 Dotmar Cougar White cover in April 2018.

Design: Deshon & Associates GRAPHIC DESIGN
Printing: University of Delaware Printing