

Arrow Rock Literary Journal: Spring 2022 Issue

Poetry

4,000 Plus Me

By: Megan VanLoo

4,000 plus me
In a town named for what it will never be.
4,000 faces, 8,000 eyes
All watching to see if I could ever touch the skies.
This is the place where dreams get squandered,
Especially for those who've never wandered.

I want to find new places to see,
A place where I can be me.
In this town they know when I've lied,
I want to go where I don't have to hide.
In this town success is hard to find,
I want to be where my dreams can't be declined.

Though home is how this place will always seem,
My dream is to go where city lights gleam.
This has been my place to grow,
But now it is time for me to put on a show.
I am ready to go out and see,
How I would do without the town of 4,000 minus me.

New

By: Emma Carriker

A child simply thought of everything they have yet to accomplish,
grew older and realized to make a self investment
To gain advantage.
craved as a child was total acceptance,
But was always met with an alternative expression.
Now all that I am left with is depression.

Nothing new, depression.

Sorrow stops me on the tracks in the train of the goals left to accomplish
consistently and constantly craving an investment.
Someone to give an advantage.
Instead of sleeping on the coach in acceptance
Of the letter F grade expression.

Autism though is a new Expression
Did it cause the depression?
I wondered what I still could accomplish
Lists are my best self investment
Otherwise every breath my brain leaps to make an advantage.
Scattered, trying to do the next thing before the first thing before the last thing for acceptance,

Pretending to be everyone else for acceptance
Idolizing their every expression
Just so I don't hate myself into a depression
What they do I don't understand how to accomplish
Faking it till I make it is a fake investment
In myself, but I refuse to give up the advantage

Every thought I think is an advantage
I lose myself in the thoughts I have of acceptance
Neurodivergent isn't a negative Expression
Nor a state of depression
My thoughts are something they could never accomplish
No matter how big the investment

Leaning into who I am is the true investment
Unique tools only my brain has the key to take advantage
I just didn't allow myself acceptance
Resulting in total chaotic expression
The key to escaping my depression
Success isn't impossible to accomplish

A Rich Man's Forest

By: Cheyenne Burns

The father of the forest awakens
to a wasteland
where the concrete colored clouds are weighed down
by the tears trying to escape.
Below, growing from the rich soil

are sickly yellow-brown weeds
coughing out for fresh air.

With one swift strike of a scythe,
the father of the forest falls.
The gloomy blooms with the last of their withering
petals have been wisped away by the wind.
They plead with the man in the business suit,
“Haven’t you taken enough?”

His corporate cackle croaks in their ears,
as the birds sing a funeral hymn.
The last bit of greenery greedily held
tightly in his palm.
Defaced with a dead man’s portrait.

Rabbit Hole

By: Emma Carriker

I am not a rabbit, but I am going down
A rabbit hole to insanity, out of my mind,
Out of my control things keep happening to me
One thing after another, a never ending spiral
Towards complete chaos of unknowing, I don't know where
To begin, begin again the spiral of loss and despair

First my walking, then my legs and their ability
Next my eyes, then the vision they see and seek
Without vision there is no purpose and I begin to lose
My mind has been lost and I am chasing it
Down the rabbit hole that I first lost it in

Barbelo in a Pink Dress

By: Ethan Plate

Walking back to the white farm house,
He laid His denim overalls
on the crustily painted porch
and cried to Himself a little.
He put the kettle on the stove
and poured hot water into a mug.

He had loved His daughter
more than His son, and every time
the mailman comes, He leaves
out cookies and milk for their journey home.

When His wife died, He left out cookies and milk
for the coroner, and swore He saw her
in a pink dress picking soybeans.
And in between each row of soybean,
dried out worms huddled around
their final resting places-
 dispersed mounds
 of dust and dried out dirt.

He swore He saw her in a pink dress
puttering out her last breaths with dust coughs
and letting the soil and worms
sift through her cracked fingers, cracked
like the land He kept in place from day to night,
kept in place like the children
who saw bright constellations
spread out above the cornfields,
locked in their rooms at night.
Carrying candles and wearing white nightgowns,
she unlocked the many doors of the house
each morning before the rooster crew out.
His daughter crawled down the stairs
where He had left out milk and cookies
on the coffee table, and she cried a little
when she saw the milk on the coffee table.

His son would cry out in the night time sometimes.
“Fairly often I have nightmares
where You come home from the field
and (statistics show that suicide rates
among farmers are the highest
of any occupation, dust sets
on a dying industry, but You had always said
it wasn’t an occupation, but a passing
on of rings engraved with family names)
but anyway, You standing there
under the staircase,
plaid sheets and Your father’s wicker chair,
and I asked You what You were doing there.
With a serene smile, You explained, and I asked You

not to kick the chair. You said
that it was for the best, I begged.
You kicked the chair, and plaid sheets
wrapped around Your twisted neck
and wicker chair sideways
on the flayed floorboards”
“This house is the body of this family,
the ceiling and the floor
the skin, and lampshades
and the air we breathe
the blood and vital organs.
When the wooden floorboards
scrape and bruise, keep your room
in place and then the ceiling
and the floor will meet
at the lampshades
and the air you breathe,”
and stoically, He draped plaid sheets
around His son’s back,
and offered warm milk
and cookies.

Crawling in her pink dress,
she didn’t look back towards him
to see the dry tears in His eyes.
The wheat fields at harvest times
waved goodbye to Him in the dust wind.
“This one’s nice,
reminds Me when she
sat and let the locusts
gnaw at her legs until
she bled out.”

The paint chipped on the house
on top the hill, and fenced out
by crooked barbed wire fencing,
she cautiously bit her tongue
so as not to bleed out, distracting
her from the locusts biting through her socks.

“The chipped paint
and barbed fencing
symbolize the withered patriarchal
forces keeping her from the body
of the house.”

After the locusts came

the dust came, so thick that layers
on your flannels and your glasses
make it hard to see. Above the wheat,
the cyclones of flurries of soil
and hawks with wings wavering
under the pressure of the wind.

“We didn’t paint the porch
the summer that she died
because the dust
was so thick
we couldn’t see the rotten wood.”

The dust stopped soon after she had disappeared
from the canvas, and then the rains came.
Storm clouds above the field began to form
and what began as little drops of water
carried bits of oil paint all the way down
to the wooden frame adjacent to the restrooms.
Why did they install such a sophisticated
sprinkler system in the museum of modern art
in new york? Many paintings ruined,
oil paint and watercolors blurred together
on emptying canvases, three weary pairs of eyes
dart back and forth at the museum
of modern art in new york, three pairs
of hands grasp together, searching for an exit.
Him, His son, and His daughter rushing out
into the crowded Manhattan streets.

The streets were only slightly flooded when they left
and little brown bags littered on the yellow concrete
lifted themselves into the misty air, air that splits itself
into layers when beheld, and emerging between the heavenly
layer and the earthly ones, a white horse rode furiously
through the cobbled streets, a rider draped in black monk robes
whose earthly name was written on the tapestry draped
across the mane so as to blind both, and a heavenly name
only he knew, and if you asked him he wouldn’t tell you it.

“you know you sent my mother to her grave
and raised us in the grave you dug for her
you talk of evil days and hands
but weave gently decorated tapestries
across our eyes”

She darted away from her father, climbing over park benches
and crumbling tenements as She weaved herself through traffic.

She bounced across water towers and almost stepped on city buses.
She climbed the wires of brooklyn bridge, and they pierced
into Her sides and forehead as She stood in a moment of clarity on the parapet.
She dived into the waters, was fished out,
asked the bartender for a free beer,
and he gently responded, "no."

But He had been watching all along from the tower of the brooklyn bridge,
laying himself out comfortably on a hippie rug, burning
incense sticks with his bic lighter.

He cried to himself a little when He saw
Her nosedive into the east river. He really had driven Her mother
into Her grave, and He felt his own grave beneath Him and His rug, but instead
of plummeting through the the undraped well contained
within the hollowed out tower of the brooklyn bridge,
He began to levitate. His head was crowned with a silk bishop hat,
and He found icons of the fall from paradise weaved into
his golden priest garments. This ski-masked magic carpet ride
above the bowery and slums, five cents for phillies
was what they paid below, but he had a gutted
and resealed cuban hanging off his lip, and his yellow teeth
morphed themselves into a twenty-four karat grill
slightly blackened by tobacco smoke, but made
sufficiently flowery by the greener smoke, but the kind
of flower that stings the soul and still gives you lung cancer. The wires
of the bridge turned yellow, the river water browning too.
He soliloquized to the ashy wind,
confidently: "I know there are those
kneeling under mother mary
pleading yahweh for my downfall
and concurrent destruction.
But I've seen the rabbi's light
before the white horse and evil deeds,
so if You ever mention Me say subhanahu wa ta'ala
cause I see both sides now like anekantavada.
All those souls I spent to drench myself in fent-laced prada,
and You were under bridges burning spoons till they were black,
but I was drugging wells before benito wore balenciaga."

With the the tassels of the rug rubbing against
the brown water, He slid above roads and bluffs
and powerplants with yellow smoke
and little trees were blurs until He periodically
lowered His altitude and brushed His feet

against the leaves. He spent almost an eternity
until He found the garden where He first laid eyes
on Her pink dress, and He cried a little to Himself
when, hovering above the farm house,
with paint just as crusty as He remembered,
He saw himself at the end of days, cracked
fingers crumbling into the ground, sitting
in His father's wicker chair, and the son
He loved less than His daughter
draped plaid sheets around His back,
and walked out into the sunset,
leaving only skeletons
to keep the land in place.

Conflicts

By: Zane Bell

Gun up, barrel down.
I end up in some sort of stupid town.
Know not where the people go,
But without reprieve, they say
I only know the status quo.

It illustrates a fate, one unknown
To them or familiar to prey alone.
They die yet die yet die yet die,
For as I rest or unsheath it here,
They live and die in that unholy sky.

Guns up, barrels down.
We kind of hate this good ole town.
It looks bad. Yes, I know,
But we had to leave,
Or chaos they would sow.

It harvests our soul, that body of
Soldiers and scholars that we cannot see above.
They resist and resist and resist and resist,
For we as move forward unto thee,
They will come on, not least til we desist.

When your feet meet the edge of the river,
look not at the reflection that looks back to you;
for one may never know who will be reflected back.

When leaving this forest,
hold your breath to ten;
for one may never know when Spring will say its farewell.

The Cube of Time

By: Luke Anderson

All I see now from my bed are pink tile and nurses filing in and out
Doing their best to keep my spirits from dragging across the floor
Upon the opening of that door,
A bright light shines in as my son brings in a blank television screen,
And sets it down slowly on the desk where the food I cannot anymore consume lies
He smiles as from behind his back he reveals the relic;
The cube of time!
It has once again entered my life brought forth by one so close to my heart
As he drags the cords along the tile,
I see my brother follow them as he once followed me
I slowly rise out of bed and hook the cables up myself; my last mission!
With eyes that lose their sight and hands that were once steady
Time travels backwards once the cube awakens from its slumber
The memories wash over me like a flood,
Freeing me from the oppression of Father Time who knocks upon my door,
Yet I do not hear the knocks but instead I hear voices:
Mother?
Father?
My brothers?
I look down at the vessel brought forth to control the cube
And notice that the buttons are wet with fresh water
I suppose these are the tears I have searched for since they all left this world

Villanelle²

By: Mike Edele

Who I kill I'll never tell.
I am an assassin.
I am Villanelle.

I love the color pink, I wish I could yell.
All others are irrelevant.
Who I kill I'll never tell.

I love the wrong girl. I was captured by her spell.
She will be my demise.
I am Villanelle.

Her name is Eve Polastri. She is my lady belle.
I love her more than life itself.
Who I kill I'll never tell.

She is the cop who will catch me. No matter where I dwell.
I won't stop what I do.
I am Villanelle.

To live without her would be to live in Hell.
I hope I don't have to kill her.
Who I kill I'll never tell.
I am Villanelle.

Wander In

By: Katie Cope

Wander in, little ghost, seeking shelter from thy woes
Let your hand twist the knob of a door locked no longer
As your feet wade in water, shallow in name alone

Wander in, little ghost, seeking shelter from thy woes
Let your hands drift the rails of long forgotten oak
As your feet meet the threads, frayed in their archaic bed

Wander in, little ghost, seeking shelter from thy woes
Let your hands glaze the chips of paint in this gilded sanctuary
As your feet pull through the webs and dust of forgotten time

Wander in, little ghost, seeking shelter from thy woes
Let your hands feel the bars on each splintered window pane
As your feet drag through the muck of softened barricades

Wander in, little ghost, but be wary of thy woes
For shelter is but shelter only when

A shelter is maintained

Fiction

Guardian Angel

By: Savannah Hill

It was a warm midsummer night, and Elijah lay sleepless in his half-empty bed. Accepting the fact that he wouldn't be asleep anytime soon, he shifted the blankets off him and stood, the wood floor cold on his feet. He opened the window beside him, gazing into the miles of tall grass stretching to the horizon that expanded into a moonless sky. He loved the rural American Midwest, adored the isolation and the endless plains. It was the best place on Earth. Wind blew in, carrying the scent of a coming storm. Taking in a deep breath, he left his room and wandered the hallways.

His wife, Katherine, was in the kitchen of their home, and he could hear her pacing footsteps as he approached. She turned around and smiled sheepishly as she noticed him, "Hi, honey."

Eli placed a kiss on her forehead, hand brushing her pregnant belly. "You should be trying to sleep already, darlin'. It's late."

"I know," Katherine said, "but the baby's been kicking and I wanted some tea," she gestured to the kettle sitting atop the stove.

"Tea's nice, but don't let it keep you up all night." He ruffled her hair.

She nodded, turned away from him. Eli frowned. The whole day it was as if she was purposefully avoiding him. Probably nothing but a passing feeling, he hoped.

She mumbled under her lips— maybe a prayer, he couldn't tell, but she was cut off by the squeal of the kettle. She immediately poured out the water into a mug and dipped the teabag, taking a drink, and ignoring how it was mostly boiling water. Eli could see her hands shake as she brought the mug to her lips.

"You alright?" Eli asked, reaching up to brush her shoulder, only meeting air as Katherine moved away. She fiddled with the cross necklace at her chest.

After a bout of silence, Katherine finally said, "I know you've been cheating. With that Liza lady from church."

Eli met her eyes. Another broken bitch.

He opened his mouth, but his wife didn't let him get a word in, "Please, don't even try to play dumb. I just want to know why." Eli could see the tears gathering in her eyes.

He sighed and softened his eyes, slumped his shoulders. He took gentle steps towards her, hand raised like she was a wild animal that needed to be tamed— a dangerous creature needing to be soothed. She hated it. She hated *him*.

"Hey, now," Eli said, voice low and smooth (though Katherine could hear its sharp edge), "no need to go around pointing fingers. How 'bout we just calm ourselves down and get some sleep?"

"No, no..." Anger bubbled up inside her, years of torment coming to the surface. "I want to--"

He grabbed her wrist, pulling it away from the cross on her chest and towards him. He tightened his grip, digging his nails into her skin. "I said, we should get to bed."

Katherine shook her head. He couldn't force her to do anything this time. They stood in silence, glaring into each other's eyes, silently daring the other to act first.

It was Katherine who tore her wrist from Eli's grip, watery eyes still locked on him. Then, she started sobbing. She fell to her knees, the tile floor the only thing preventing her from sinking into the dirt. Eli backed away. Again, like she was a goddamn animal.

Eli only stared. When Katherine made no move to get off the floor, he went to the bedroom. He closed the window and though the door was closed, he could still hear his wife's cries echo into the night.

It was three o'clock in the morning when Eli awoke. Katherine was still gone from his bed. Stubborn whore, she must be.

His mouth was dry and the lack of sleep made his eyes heavy, yet he was too awake now to bother trying again. He hauled himself onto his feet. A breeze blew through his hair through the open window. He walked over, brow furrowing. His hands reached to shut it, but he paused. The night was darker than it had been. The fields outside were still—windless—and shadows clung to every crevice.

An uneasy feeling rose within Eli, something he couldn't place. As he stared out into the expanse before him, he could've sworn he saw someone move out of the corner of his eye among the grass. There and gone again before he could process. Katherine must be having one of her fits again, running around in tears like she usually did after he's stern with her. Though, whatever he saw didn't look like her at all. Taller, skinner, longer hair. The image of his ex-wife came to mind, but he brushed it off as a trick of the dark. She was long dead, and he was all the better for it.

Behind him, a floorboard creaked. He jumped, only to see Katherine, her face still stained with tears.

"Sorry, honey. I went to get a drink of water." She stood shyly, hands behind her back and head down like a child.

Eli slammed the window shut and Katherine flinched. "I hope you've learned your lesson." She nodded, lips pursed. "Now let's see if we can actually sleep." He collapsed into bed, not bothering to see if she followed.

Katherine crept to the edge of the bed, Eli sleeping on the opposite side. She was so close. She brought her hands forward. The kitchen knife she held in them shone even in the dark, yet it trembled as she brought it closer to Eli's heart. No, his neck would work better. She moved it up. She pressed the tip to his skin, only the barest bit of force.

Eli's eyes snapped open and he jumped, drawing a line of red across his shoulder. He whipped his head towards his wife, fury burning in his eyes, "What the fuck?"

Katherine cowered, backing away. They were on opposite sides of the bed, a queen size mattress keeping the two apart. Nothing felt farther.

"What were you trying to do?" Eli demanded, his fists balling and a vein in his forehead protruding. When she didn't answer, he yelled louder. "Answer me!"

Katherine looked at the weapon in her hand and back at her husband. She was tired. So, so tired.

She let the words fall out. “You think I ever wanted to be this? You think I ever wanted to be a wife? A mother? I never did! Never...” She trailed off, lip trembling. All the years of hatred had come to this. She had loved him, the juvenile pursuits of a teenage girl who thought being with an older man made her mature. When she said her vows, just barely 18, she thought it would be forever. She couldn’t have been further from the truth. Ghosts of old bruises stung her skin and she reminded herself: he never loved her. She knew she was right about that.

God forgive her.

She lunged across the bed, teeth bared and a strangled cry escaping her throat, but Eli was quicker as he dodged the blade and sprinted out of the bedroom into the living room for the single landline that sat in their house. The singular source of connection with any other people for miles. But just as he reached for the handset, Katherine swiped at the cord. Sparks flew like the smallest fireworks from the exposed wires.

“Jesus fucking Christ, you psycho bitch! What’s wrong with you?!”

Katherine swiped at him, eyes wide in adrenaline repressed rage. Eli only stepped back and back again, narrowly dodging her attempts. It was almost a dance with the way they moved around the house. It was almost beautiful.

The dance continued, but Katherine could not and would not let him leave with his life. He could plead, beg, but she knew it would end with blank and soulless eyes. It had to.

She cornered him in the kitchen. Eli backed against a corner, chest heaving and eyes darting. Katherine approached, hair matted to her forehead, blood across her lip and dripping from a head wound. Despite her pregnant body, she had been fast. Unnaturally so. Eli would’ve never expected her to be so capable, to not be so pathetically helpless. But, looming in front of him, she had power over him for the first time. Shadows crossed his vision, blurry, but soon they settled into a shape behind Katherine. A person. Pale, dull skin marked by something dark and dripping, and her neck bent at an unnatural angle.

Katherine kept the blade by her side, only asking, “Why?” When she spoke, there were two voices.

Eli didn’t answer, balling his fist and taking the opportunity to punch her across the jaw with a sickening crack. He squeezed his way under her arm, sprinting to the front door. He was fast, but Katherine—cheered on by fury—was just barely faster. She tackled him, pulling them both to the ground with a thud. With Eli pinned under her, she raised the knife above her head.

She hesitated. Nothing more than a moment, a single second that seemed to stretch into her personal type of forever. And as she brought her blade down, she felt another pair of hands guiding her towards her mark, a second heartbeat in her chest. Like her guardian angel.

Eli’s eyes widened, “Devils! Devils, both of y—”

Katherine’s knife pierced his neck, digging into the muscle. Deep scarlet erupted from within, covering her hands. Red bubbled from his mouth as tears started to form in fading eyes. She stabbed him again, and again, and again, lost in ecstasy. Finally, his eyes stared up into nothing. Open but unseeing.

Katherine stared at what she had done. She hauled herself to her feet, taking a moment to breathe. And then, she screamed. A raw, hoarse cry made up of every single emotion she had ever felt. She shouted until it was painful, and even then she continued a bit more.

Sparks crackled from the other room, she waited until she saw flames dancing across the hardwood. With her vision clouded from tears and blood, she took ahold of the cross at her neck and snapped it off, throwing it on Eli's corpse.

May God have no mercy on his soul.

Katherine left through the back door. With the stench of smoke and old memories behind her, the house went up in flames. She limped ahead. Under the moonless night sky, she couldn't help but smile.

A Diary Entry on the Eve of the Battle of Bosworth Field - Sunday, August 21, 1485

By: Amanda Sciandra

I never meant to reign King. Should I fall tomorrow, this will not be the tragedy of Richard III, but the story of how two brothers of York, squandered our father's dynasty, and how I, the third, tried valiantly to save it.

That cloud of Tudor that hung over our house had retreated into the troughs of the swelling sea, and was swallowed and buried in our rising tide. But even from within the watery tomb of the seas, that salty Tudor vapor rose and permeated the cracks and crevices of our House of York.

Ah that vile, stinking House of Tudor! That Leviathan Dynasty... that primordial eel!

I understood and honored my duty to our House of York. I fought for my King, my brother, Edward IV, in that War of Roses and played whatever part I had to, in order to see to the demise of that fraudulent King Henry VI and his son.

My brother, twice King Edward IV, ruled fairly, I admit, and he was right to charge our brother, Clarence, of treason. Clarence's allegiances were dubious at best and perhaps better suited for jealous Clarence himself than for our prestigious House of York. But, as Jesu would, I forgive him - for if I were prone to the jealousy and ambition of a middle child, and torn between blood and soil, I am not sure I could find my loyalty anything but torn in bloody two; to choose between subservience to your spuriously sovereign king or fight for your own father's divine legacy?

But my brother was a weak and indecisive ruler. He led with his heart on all matters. His wavering resolve in executing Clarence was evident of that, as was his marriage. (I was able to remedy the former, but not the latter.) Rather than further secure the York dynasty with a strategic union, he married for lust the golden-haired daughter of a traitor. Elizabeth spent her days further weakening Edward's resolve where it suited her, while plotting and sowing the seeds of her own progenies' demise. Her husband's heart, once beating strong with his final victory over Henry, began to strain under his portly, piggish paunch.

The death of my dear brother Henry brought upon our house a dogwood winter; those sprouting seedlings of York planted so joyfully before his death would never come to harvest. His death, inevitable, premature, stirred further the tides of the old vendettas of the warring roses, which had died neither with the death of Henry VI or his own. The Princes were both too young to assume the crown. Their meddling mother Queen Elizabeth and her cohorts, even before his death, had churned the waters of chaos that would continue to erode the soil of our Father's England; the crest of each wave of York sowing deeper mistrust, suspicion, and an evermore volatile crown.

And Anne. Oh dear, sweet Anne! She was there for the taking. The spoils of war. Wooed not just by my charm but by House's growing power... the legitimacy of the reign of York could not be denied. She knew it was her destiny to one day be queen, and so, her hand was mine. Oh! To think she'd marry her husband's killer? It was no truer that I killed her father-in-law and husband, than if she had killed my own father. To that end, allow me to clear her name. But she knew clearly that as the wife of the Prince she was next in line to the throne, and that as his widow she may as well have stood with her feet buried in the sands at the bottom of the sea. But with her hand joined to mine, and with her already knowing the treachery of Richmond's kind, marriage to me was a furious tread to an adjacent wave. Her outward disdain toward me was thus devised to create some plausible deniability should she need to flip allegiances again. But, make no mistake, Anne loved me. And regardless of my hand in her death being truth or lie, to Lady Anne, there was much more than met the eye - I tell you it was *she* who "turned yon fellow in his lonely grave", and not I!

And if I did have some hand in her demise? Am I obliged to confess to any of you? No - I would only confess before the countenance of God, and only if my misdeeds were not His will. But the truth is she poisoned herself, albeit on my own leaden shilling, and of her own briny volition. I wept for Anne's death - she had sailed under the spindrift curl of this last wave of York toward the shores of Gehenna for many years...

And my dear nephews! Those doe-eyed farrows - their deaths were never on the forefront of my mind, for their youth and innocence could yet be molded to reinforce our family's divine right. But on the day I discussed young nephew's coronation, it was made clear adopting them as my progeny, and making of them my loyal sons, had been made needlessly difficult, if not impossible, by the words of their meddling mother and her gossip-hags. The path of their treachery against their own father's legacy were paved upon the deaths of their uncle and halfbrother.

Oh how those "mighty gossips" all mourned the untimely deaths of their husbands and sons! And in their grief that insidious House of Tudor marred further my legacy, and painted me not just a villain, but the devil himself - that I would not be so mourned should I unearth my own untimely demise.

And Margaret, the prophetess so they say. Old and battle-worn is she. A dusty old Queen set aptly upon the black square of the board. A cunning strategist, through her scornful curses, she reaped the bounty of her own loathful vision in the mouths of the other wailing widows. But in her I see now, like I, she worked loyally for her House, albeit a false one, and she nearly succeeded in again, usurping our throne. Empathy aside, the old hag was the head of the ubiquitous Tudor sea-beast, and in hindsight, it may have served us better to lop it off, as it was

she who cursed my brother's wife and who was determined to prove *me* a villain and make the legacy of York forever bent and unfinished.

And was I not, then, simply a man of my time? I was Duke of Gloucester. Well-enough loved. You see, ambition never belonged to me. It was instead coveted by my duty. The advancement of the House of York, the legacy of the White Boar, was the cross I, myself, bore. What good is a ruthless line of rulers? What King toes further back behind the line? What King fails to couple his cunning and aggression?

I accepted my dead brother's throne only at the behest of Buckingham (once my Marc Antony... now, my Brutus.) But what King, what champion of the House of York, wishes a temporary reign while he still lives and breathes? And what if my dear nephews had the cowardice and naïveté of my brother Edward, that they should hesitate at the execution of their own warrants for the death of traitors? And what if they should join their mother and her fellow "gentlewomen" into falsely making the loyal servants of the House of York, me, the enemy to our own house? How could I, but by their deaths, ensure the future of the reign of York? These young boys, already over-fed at their mother's teats, would be subjected to their veiled smiles of deceit, flattery and fawn.

I, the youngest of my brothers, *and* by some fateful coincidence, my father's namesake, was at a crossroads; one road upon which I was destined to be ruled by Tudor-indoctrinated, sharp-tongued babes, the other to rule as the only Son of York yet worthy of the throne.

Was I not, after all, Lord Protector of the Realm?

So with heart-felt forgiveness for my poor Clarence's treachery, for Edwards's loveblindness and glut, and of my dear nephews' sweet naïveté, I chose to play the role of the devil to Tudor's England. But in my loyalty to the divine right of our family's throne, I played not just the role of saint, but of God.

That G, Edward dreamt? That raging sea? That was me! For *I* am the hand of God, *and* the scourge of Him. That G, me, that is, I and I -- gladly take blame, if it means the divine right of the House of York is bored into the heart of England!

I suppose my bent shadow serves well-enough as the object of the Tudor's derision. Let them have it. Let them cower in it. Upon the back of Surrey, my faithful steed, I shall ride; she will be swift beneath me as I slash and burn away the stench and fog of Tudor, for I, Richard III, am the cruel sword of the Lord, fated to cut down the tentacles of that creeping sea serpent!

The Sun of York, will finally rise over England. The bones of Richmond, Stanley and his widow-wife, will be picked clean and bleached in the depths of the sea! My niece will be a Kingmaker, the *true* Sons of England shall be sown in her womb! Tomorrow, that crimson battlefield will
hear the squall of God's victory!

I, the most worthy son of Richard II! I, King Richard III! I, His Chosen! I, the White Boar of York! I, King!

* * *

The restless night had brought with it 11 ghosts; all told me "despair and die." From a fever dream, I awoke, lamenting the death of my pale horse. I uncurled myself from my fetal shape, and dared to peer outside toward the charnel angle. The sun will not shine today.

What a sad scourge am I? That God should *now*, on the eve of my fate, bestow upon me a cowardice of mind? What is this coward-conscience? What does it mean? Does Richmond, too, feel the weight of his own family's treachery? Or has this dark morning only brought forth the fruit of *my* sins ripened under this black stratus-sky? Would God be so fickle to hear the curses of that ancient queen, and let from Heaven fly his indignation and ire?

Should I find my death on that bloody battlefield, I wonder... will I be greeted as the Prodigal Son before the white-flowered gates of Heaven or the rosy'd lichgates of Purgatory?

Lavender Sky

By: *Tevye J. Schmidt*

"It takes me by surprise, sometimes."

"Whatcha talking about?"

"The sunrise here. It's so different." Aaron gestured out, hand waving toward the red grass around them and the twin moons that could barely be seen across the horizon as the sky lit up in a vibrant splash of lavender.

Dern nodded, and leaned comfortably against the sturdy wooden fence behind him. His tail lashed against the crossbar. The wood used for the posts had been imported and was sturdier than anything native to the planet. Mostly soft wood grew here, and a lot of trees that were technically tall grasses, no good for building with. The fence had worn smooth in the decades it had sat here on the edge of the property. Thick weeds with orange brambles wound their way up and across the fence posts, no matter how often the two men came out to pull them, and they snagged at Dern's tail.

The sun rose, slow and steady, ambling its way into the sky like the draft-horses that they bred. There was no need for speed in any sense of the word. The horses ambled along, happily without purpose; the people did as well. The chill of night-time fled fast, and the air prickled coolly against their exposed skin. This was the dry season, so there was no dew on the ground, and Aaron's lips felt strange with the thick balm he'd picked up from the general goods in town. The atmosphere was just another one of the differences he'd had to become accustomed to since he arrived.

Tearing his eyes away from the sky, Aaron shifted and gestured with one hand, fingers splayed. Dern grunted, turned as well, and passed the hammer over. The trip to the moon market tomorrow weighed heavily on both of their minds. They'd be leaving things unattended save for the ranch hands, and while they considered the crew trustworthy there was nothing like the peace of mind that came from repairing your borders by your own hand. In the back of his mind, however, Aaron appreciated that his biggest concern in life was an impending trip that he was actually very excited to make.

Aaron and Dern worked in near silence for most of the morning, making their way from one minor repair to the next. Eventually the midday sirens sounded and the two men began making their way back to the main house. Dern headed off with a nod to put the tools in the shed, and Aaron kept going. He held his nose as he walked past the feed barn, still unused to the strong odor the red grass gave off as it dried. There were ranch hands making their way to the house as well, and as they waved Aaron nodded at them, though he kept his distance. It was never fun to spend your down time around the boss, in his experience, and they deserved their entire break without having to pretend to find him interesting.

Aaron wasn't really sure yet what it was about him that caused this, but everyone he'd met on Ortellus so far had been overly friendly. He figured that during his first few months he really gave off those new transplant vibes, and that everyone was eager and friendly when it came to helping newcomers, but it hadn't stopped. It had been particularly bad yesterday, when he'd gone to the store for the protective lip balm and had left Dern at home.

The bell to the shop had tinkled inoffensively, signaling a new customer to Fain, the older woman who owned the store. She was back to working the register, she had told Aaron the first day he arrived, because she had sent her children off to the University to get a good education, and maybe find a spouse. She had elbowed him in the side and winked at that, her whiskers twitching as she stared into his eyes, unblinking.

Fain had walked out of the back room yesterday, humming to herself and dusting flour from her hands onto her ever-present apron, though her ears perked up as she noticed Aaron. "Oh, my favorite customer," she greeted, pulling Aaron in for a tight hug. He had been wanting to buy some snacks for the trip to the moon, but it wasn't long before Fain was *tsking* about the way the dry season affected his un-furred skin and pressing balms and lotions into his hands. She had implored him to come back next weekend when her children came home, adding that they could show him the town. Aaron had held himself off from telling her that the town was about three ranches, a diner, her store, a handful of different religious organizations, a school, and a library. He'd become perfectly acquainted with all of it after ten minutes on Ortellus.

The hounding hadn't gotten better when he left, stopping at the diner on his way back home. Aaron had run into three different women, old enough to be his mother, who asked if he had any plans for the ice-cream social being held by the intra-religious council. When he'd said that he thought he'd be going with Dern they all looked intrigued, though he was met with three separate scowls when it became clear that it was because neither of them had taken enough of a break to find a date.

"You'll both work yourselves into an early grave," Mai-Ra, one of the women, growled. She walked tall still, not allowing her age to stoop her posture or slow her gait. She always wore a long red cape and had one eye, the other scratched out long ago in battle. She was one of the few non-natives living here, and so she and Aaron always made a point to stop and say hello when they saw one another. Mai-Ra was the one he'd gone to for skin-care advice in this

climate as well, because even though she came from a desert world, she had smooth dark skin, and not fur like the natives here. After the scolding, though, Aaron had just shrugged helplessly and scurried back to the old work truck he always drove when he came to town.

Even while wearing his best 'I'm busy, please don't stop me' look, Aaron had been forced to suffer through several more stages of this before arriving at home. He had grown altogether more ready to visit the moon markets to get away from it all, worry slipping completely from his mind. While he was one of the handful of aliens on this part of Ortellus, the moon markets were full of other species and travelers, so while they were more exotic Aaron seemed barely out of place there. Mentioning this to Dern had made the other man laugh, which was a rare occurrence. He'd just shaken his head when Aaron asked what was funny, though.

Lark song filled the air as a breeze carried the song through the ranch, and Dern caught back up to Aaron as he crested the hill, clasping him on the arm briefly. He grunted once and handed Aaron a cold drink from Dern's secret stash, and he took it gratefully. It was Coke, from Earth, in a glass bottle. Aaron had no clue how much it cost to ship, but it was Dern's private vice, and was one thing the otherwise thrifty man was willing to spend money on. It worked out in Aaron's favor that it was his favorite as well, and Dern had always been willing to share with him.

"Do you think they'll have anything from home at the market?" This was a non sequitur, spoken aloud to quiet and empty air as Aaron leaned back against the tree that he and Dern had sat under to eat their lunch. Time had passed lazily, and as the heat rose with the sun the two men had had a silent conversation with their eyes before agreeing, without speaking a single word, to skive off for the afternoon.

Aaron patted the sweat from his brow with the lower hem of his t-shirt and looked at Dern, who remained unflappable as always. He couldn't tell if the other man sweated through the thick fur that covered his body, and he was always afraid to ask in case it would come across as rude.

After a long moment, Dern shrugged. "Not sure. Would be neat, though."

Aaron nodded and smiled. His bright white teeth cut straight through his face like lightning through the dark, and he held half of his sandwich up.

"I'm kind of bored with this. Want it?"

Wordlessly, Dern held out a hand. He smiled as Aaron handed it over, and his pupils widened from their thin black slits, slowly growing rounder. In response, Dern tossed his apple over, or whatever the local equivalent was called. It was shaped like an apple, though it was maroon, and tasted more like a strawberry.

The two of them passed the afternoon in silence, Aaron whittling, or trying to, and Dern reading a book Aaron had loaned him. It was *The Gods Themselves* by Isaac Asimov, an early science fiction classic. Aaron had been nervous to admit that classic science fiction was his favorite genre, being that he was currently co-owner of a ranch on an alien planet, millions of light-years from his home, but Dern hadn't judged. He seemed really into the book, specifically the middle part about aliens. He had talked for hours about that yesterday while they rolled wire for the new chicken coops. Aaron didn't think he'd heard the man say that many words since he'd first arrived, but he hadn't wanted to interrupt once. Something about the slow and measured way that Dern spoke was hypnotizing, and Aaron felt that he could listen to him speak until the eventual heat-death of the universe.

"We should head in."

It was Aaron's turn to nod silently, and he stood slowly, stretching, and twisting life back into his locked-up limbs. He waved goodbye to all the ranch hands as they left, each one calling out a goodbye in turn. Dern and Aaron headed amicably back to the main house to finish preparing for their trip in the morning.

The sun came up again, as it has for eons, and with it the birds began to sing. Aaron rose quickly, glad for the chance to sleep in a little bit. He wasn't shocked to find Dern already freshly groomed and ready to go, packing up the leftovers from the ranch hands' breakfast. He had oatmeal with apple slices ready as well, and Aaron felt his eyes sting a little with the faint hint of joyful tears that Dern had remembered how sick Aaron got during spaceflight and had made him something easy to digest.

The morning passed in a similar comfortable silence to the previous afternoon. Aaron enjoyed being able to just exist in Dern's presence, finding the quiet comforting in a way he'd never experienced before. As he sat to eat, Dern passed behind him and settled a warm hand on Aaron's shoulder. His sharp claws were retracted, but Aaron could feel the prickle of them ghost against his skin through his thin shirt. Dern gently set a book on the table, clearing his throat.

"S our science fiction. Really old stuff, now, since we stopped writing it for a while after the wars. Anyway." He leaned over and wiped at an invisible speck on the table, though his other hand remained firmly on Aaron's shoulder. "You read Ortellan well enough now, I was thinking you could handle some fiction. Might keep you from filching my newspapers every morning, too," Dern added, though his pupils were so round they almost eclipsed his irises completely, and Aaron knew that he was joking.

The moment was gone in a flash as one of the ranch hands, Merrin, burst through the back door. "Just grabbing some water!" he called into the main house. The two men relaxed again, but the moment had passed. Dern went off to double check the house, and Aaron ate and brought down his luggage. The drive to the shuttle bay was similarly quiet, but Aaron was more

than content. He spent the trip in peaceful contemplation on what the markets had in store for him.

The Church of the Golden Arches

By: Sydney Clark

Mona walked through the abandoned street. The road was grey and faded – huge chunks broke off from the large asphalt islands. Husks surrounded her – places called “Gas Stations” and “Convenient Stores” were sprinkled throughout the street. The buildings were not alone on this road: large trees bellowed without a single leaf upon them. There was not a patch of grass anywhere to be found in the World Leftover. Instead of grass, there was ash.

Mona gripped her backpack tighter. The quiet unnerved her; though she was used to coming to the surface, the World Leftover still frightened her in its loneliness.

Her mother told her about the disasters that caused the surface to be left for dead. Too ambitious people superheated the world, bringing the Great Flood that began at the tip of Earth and took the old civilizations with it. Those who survived had found high ground – only to find the heat was only getting worse.

Mona’s father told her that the world soon became caught in the Great Fire. Cities were destroyed, animals and humans were killed, and the land was turned red. The humans who were able to escape the Great Fire dove below ground. They laid down their roots as soon as the initial fear loosened its hold over them. They created cities united under The Order of the Underground. Each city was run by a presiding Ambassador of the Order. There were 77 Ambassadors, and they all met at the largest city – Heartland – to discuss business for the good of the Underground. Mona lived in one of the outer cities close to the surface tunnels, Ashwood.

After ten centuries under the Earth’s Crust, people began surfacing again. Instead of seeing the greenery and the ocean blue sky, they were only met with a surface looking like leftover firewood. Most stay away from the surface, but others walk the ash-filled streets to find something out in the dead zones.

Mona did not know why the World Leftover intrigued her so much. Her father told her it was her ancestors calling her to discover where she came from, but her mother thought that was a bunch of horse feces (whatever horses were).

The girl had searched many different places using the stars and Cardinal Directions as her guide. Today she decided to follow the Day Devil as it raced across the sky. Many of her people feared the Day Devil because it had caused the destruction of the World Leftover. Mona, unlike the others, saw it as the true guide of the surface. Though she mostly did not follow it, today she decided to go off her normal path. The Day Devil guided Mona down the street. “Where are you taking me?” she asked curiously. Even though she was alone, Mona kept her voice low. Did she not want the Day Devil to hear her, she had no idea.

Mona held her hand over her eyes as the Day Devil descended lower towards the underground. *It’s getting late*, she thought. *I think I should turn back*. She sighed as she stopped. She gazed at where she had just come from, asking herself whether she should return

home. Mona looked towards the Day Devil once more. Her eyes followed its path to the... *What did Mum call it? ...the horizon.*

The girl jumped in surprise. A structure was blocking her view of the Day Devil. She could not make out what it was in the light, so she turned to its shadow. The cast on the road was of two great arches connected with the center stem. "This is what you were guiding me too!" she exclaimed with a smile. The Day Devil seemed to ignore the girl and continued on its journey.

As the light disappeared, Mona could make out the color of the arches. They were golden; they rested upon tall polls rising into the sky. Next to them was a building, just as broken as the rest of those along the road. Mona looked back for a moment, debating on turning back towards the Underground. It only took a second before Mona was heading to the building.

Whatever material was in the frames of the door, it was far from gone now. Carefully, Mona squeezed through the bottom frame. Once she was inside, she took out her light wand. She clicked the button, shining the ray into the room. She found seats, both broken and damaged, all around. She stopped at the counter at the head of the room. What looked like televisions hung above the countertop. Behind the counter was rows and rows to hold things Mona did not know. She saw an area in the back blocked off by debris.

Her mind began racing with ideas of what this place could be. "There are so many seats here, so many people could be in this place at once." She held her chin while she thought. As she thought, she continued searching with her light. She spotted a faded picture on the wall behind the counter. Quickly, she raced towards it. The picture had been scratched where the person's head was, so Mona could not make out his face. She could just make out a glimpse of red hair upon his head; on his body rested a mainly yellow jumpsuit with red and white sleeves.

She gasped, "I know what this is." Mona leaped onto the countertop. She clenched her fists in victory. "This must be the Church of the Golden Arches!" She descended onto the ground. With one of her hands, she patted the countertop below the televisions. "This must be where the head priest gave their sermons," she explained. She motioned to the open floor with the seats. "They would speak while those listening would be out here." Mona turned to look at the picture. "They worshipped the speaker of the Day Devil, the Red Ambassador!"

Satisfied, Mona exited the building. She walked to where she could see the Day Devil's rays. "I understand what you wanted to show me." Mona nodded and said, "Thank you." Turning away from the rays, she pumped her arms in an excited manner, jumping back and forth on her tiptoes. "I must tell the Underground at once. Maybe a church can be developed for worship in the Underground now that I have found it!" She smiled and began running back to her home.

Corona Chronicles

And the Light Shines On: Sic Luceat Lux Vestra

By: Ana Schnellmann

It was a dreary day when I awoke, stiff from the yardwork I did in a fit of restless, Covid-19

boredom yesterday, and worried about the lessons I had to post that I didn't get to yesterday. I sat stolidly in front of the bright computer screen, and despite the many cups of coffee I had consumed, I just couldn't seem to get into the rhythm of my work. I struggled for an hour trying to make an engaging voice-over for the reading about James Baldwin for my general education literature students, and I was boring myself so much my teeth fell asleep. Sighing, I tried again, working to interject some energy into the lecture, and wondering if the kids would even listen to it. If they didn't, I wouldn't blame them. They have enough on their minds already, dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. And could I really be an online professor?

I got up to stretch and have yet another cup of coffee, my fifth, I think, and the phone rang, startling me. Not that many people call! "Hello?" I queried. "Hi, Dr. Callmas? This is Cheryl Durant." The phone call wasn't a total surprise—Cheryl had said on Facebook she might be calling me. She's an English teacher now, and I am sure a good one, and she had said something about my Zooming in on one of her classes, but I didn't really expect her to follow through. I kind of thought it was one of those "Let's do lunch" types of things. Still, it was certainly a welcome break from that danged voice-over! We talked for over an hour, about LU back in the day, about her life as a teacher, about her kids and my dogs. "You really changed my whole life, you know," she said. "I've tried really hard to be like the teacher you are." My eyes dampened. "That's quite a compliment, Cheryl. Still, it's a two-way street. You made me into the teacher I am." There was a pause. The subject was changed. The natter continued. The memories flooded back.

Year: 1995. I had just been hired as an assistant professor to be a generalist at Lindenwood College, a very small, struggling liberal arts school. I was only 31 years old and not even finished with my PhD. Although I had taught for a couple of years as a TA, I was far from confident. The first day of my "real job, real life" commenced. I had an 8:00 composition class high on the third floor of Roemer Hall. I had dressed carefully that day, and I was sweating not just from the heat of the non-air-conditioned room but from nerves. Could I do this thing? Could I be a PROFESSOR? I entered room 313, and tried to give a confident grin which turned into a weak smile. The class began. I regarded my 13 or so students and said, "Um, good morning. I'm Professor Callmas. How are you all today?" Silence. My hands were sweating even more. "Let's get started. Composition is an ongoing process, and I want to see where you all are with writing. So today, we'll just do a little diagnostic essay. No grades at stake. Just write me an essay on something you believe in." Still, silence. They stared at me and I stared at them. "Please, take out a piece of paper and a pen, and write about 500 words. What do you believe in, and why?" I gave that weak smile again. All went silently to work. All but one.

The one sat at her desk, paper and pen in front of her, and she was looking down, her face pinched and drawn. Was it defiance? Should I scold her? Slowly, I went to her. Slowly, she raised her head. "Um, is there a problem? Is the prompt not clear?" She looked at me. "What's wrong? Are you okay?" She was pale with two bright spots of red on her cheeks. I knew she was from Alaska—was it the heat? It had to have been over 90 in that classroom. Was she sick? "Um, I can't," she almost whispered. "Can't what?" "I can't write! I can't write! I can't do it!" I'd never seen an animal caught in a trap, but she looked like one: hopeless and scared. It wasn't defiance. I knelt by her desk, and I softened my voice. "Okay. Okay. It's okay. Look, you can write your name, right? Just write down your name." She did. I took the paper from her, and wrote down a sentence: "I believe _____ because _____, _____,"

and _____.” “Fill in the blanks. That’s all you have to do right now. Just fill in the blanks.” She did. “That’s great. See, you wrote a thesis! Now, write a paragraph, just a few sentences, about each of those things you put in the blanks. That’s all you have to do. You can do it. I’m here. Just do it. I know you can.” Inwardly, I was wondering if she could. Was she illiterate? Did she seriously not know how to write? What was she doing at college, this strange little being? She bent her head, her chestnut hair falling over that pinched face, and she began to write, slowly at first, and then more fluidly, and then more fluidly still. I stayed right there by her desk, and watched her write. “See? You did it. You wrote your very first college essay!” “Yeah, I did, didn’t I? I did it!” We smiled at each other. The class ended.

From that moment on, I became her hero. What I did was hardly heroic—I just gave the kid a shot of confidence, and she, unknowingly, did the same for me. She learned she could write. I learned I could teach. Cheryl Duncan, for that was her name, changed her major to English. She signed up for work-study in the English department, and she became more and more and more confident. We began to banter. She’d come into my office where I’d be smoking (allowed in offices at that time) and drinking coffee. “Callmas! Those things will kill you!” “Duncan! Respect your elders!” “Need a freaking gas mask in here!” “Just grade the quizzes, and no lip, okay? You know what? You want to get out of here? Go get me a doughnut.” She returned with a fruit cup. “That’s not a doughnut, Duncan.” “Well, you can kill yourself with smoking or with sugar and fat, but not both.” We would laugh at times like those.

Year: 1996. My second year of teaching and Duncan’s second year of being an English major. As was characteristic of me, I arrived at work very early one morning, about 6:30. Duncan was sitting cross-legged on the floor outside my office like an overgrown, anxious elf, her dyed duckling yellow short hair in Little Prince-like disarray. She had that pinched look about her again, the one I had seen in the composition class. “Kid, what’s wrong?” She looked at me. “My room burned down.” “Your . . . room burned down? Come in. Tell me about it.” I reached for my cigarettes and lighter and put them down. “Well, there was an electrical fire in my room, and—everything’s gone!” “How is your hamster?” (She had a hamster, Texas, she would take nearly everywhere with her. These days, ole Texas would be called an ESA). She looked at me, tears in her eyes, sobs caught in her throat. “I think he’s dead . . . and, and . . . I heard kids laughing about ‘Texas Toast!’” Oh, sweet baby girl. I sat and regarded her. “Okay. Okay. It’s okay, Duncan, it’s okay.” As it turns out, Texas was fine; a firefighter had scooped him out of his cage, and Texas bit the firefighter and was dropped on the floor. But I knew Texas wasn’t trivial. She sat in my office for a bit, and she calmed down. We got her another room, and I got up a little subscription for her for books and clothes and the like. Her mother called me to thank me—“Cheryl just lost it!” “Lost what?” “I mean, she just broke down. Thank you so much for looking after her!” What I did was so little. I offered comforting noises, got the kid some materials. That’s all. But she knew she was cared for. Cheryl continued her college, absolutely rocking it with a rap rendition of Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*, talked about books and books and books with me, and happily went off to soccer practice wearing her little Spiderman backpack. I went to most of her games and many of her practices; her parents were far away in Alaska, and I enjoyed watching the kids play.

Year: 1998. Springtime. Duncan’s third year, my third year teaching at LU. I came to work one morning early. I opened a memo: “Mandatory faculty meeting at 8:00.” I went, wondering what the deal was. President Spellmann took the podium. A Texan working class man, he drawled

out, “Somethin’ terrible has happened. A girl has been killed. We are the victims of a dumping. The body was found by the Commerce Bank (now the Welcome Center). Nobody at Lindenwood was involved. Do what you do—teach. Keep the kids calm. Cooperate with authorities. This mess will soon be straightened out, but the Major Case Squad is here.” The room started to buzz louder and louder. I got up, put on my backpack, and went to class. Rumors abounded. “I heard it was a Lindenwood student that got killed!” “She was decapitated!” “Is someone going to kill us?” “Guys, guys, guys,” I said, “Let’s focus. It will be straightened out. It will be okay.” The girl’s head was found in a porta-potty, and the police, after cleaning the head up some, started circulating pictures trying to find out who the victim was. Cheryl was on crutches after having knee surgery for a soccer injury. I encountered her on the cobbled sidewalk, and her shocked face was white again, pinched again, in sharp contrast to her now shoulder-length purple hair. “Cheryl. What’s the matter?” “Amber didn’t come home last night. Oh my god, Dr. Callmas, oh my god!” Amber was her sister. “Cheryl. Come with me. It’s going to be okay. Come on, now, come on—let’s go to my office.” Amber was fine—she had spent the night with a boyfriend, as we soon ascertained with a few phone calls. But for that one horrible hour, both of us were wondering if Amber had been murdered, an hour during which Cheryl sat with her head in her hands, and I had no idea what to do. Amber, thankfully, was fine. But for that semester, helicopters buzzed overhead, “the Lindenwood murder” was on every news, and police were looking for “a Caucasian, from 18-22 years old, wearing a flannel shirt and a ball cap”—pretty much a description of every male at LU. As it turned out, it was one of our students who had murdered a fifteen-year-old child at an on-campus gathering, raped her and murdered her, cut off her head and threw it in a porta-potty, cut off her hands and discarded them. The campus community grew closer, more silent, more stressed. Rules were tightened after the murder—no visitation, certainly no parties. The campus dispersed in May, and life went on, if more somberly.

Year: 1999. Spring term. I was teaching literary criticism for the first time, and I was enjoying the teaching of it. Duncan had grown into a competent, confident senior and was flying through the puzzles of poststructuralism. We hung out together on campus, and I enjoyed our banter. I was so proud of our little English major! One day, Duncan came to my office, flung her backpack (not the Spiderman one anymore) down and flung herself angrily in a chair. “What?” I asked her. “Just what now?” “I got freaking kicked out is what!” she answered, ruffling her hands through her now chestnut hair. “Kicked . . . out? What the hell are you talking about?” “I got KICKED OUT, Callmas! I’m not going to graduate!” “Slow down. Just slow the hell down. Tell me.” “I was, like, at a party, and I got caught, okay? NO drinking, NO parties, and I’m EXPELLED, that’s what!” I was chair of the department then. “Okay. Okay. Cheryl, look, it’s okay. It’s not the end of the world.” “YES, it freaking IS! What am I going to tell my parents??? They’re coming here for my graduation next month, and there isn’t going to be a graduation!” “Cheryl. Write a letter of appeal to the Dean of Students. I’ll support you. Just say you made a mistake and you’re sorry and . . .” “I’m NOT sorry! Everyone parties! I just got CAUGHT! It’s not fair and I won’t risk my integrity by saying ‘I’m sorry’ when I’m NOT! I’ll take the freaking consequences, okay? I’m not going to lie, not even for you! You’re telling me to LIE!” “Lie if you have to. There was one successful martyr, and look what happened to him! You WILL write the freaking letter, okay?!” I calmed down. “Look, kid, just do it. Write the letter. Jump through the hoops. Trust me, it’s not worth your future—is it integrity or pride speaking here?” She glared at me. I

sighed. “Look—I know I taught you about Kant’s categorical imperative and that once that imperative has been chosen, it can’t be broken. You chose integrity. I know that. I get that.” I lit a cigarette and took a drag. “But break it. Yeah, I’m asking you to lie. I am asking you to write it. Just like you wrote that essay in your freshman year, remember? Want me to draft a thesis for you?” She wanly smiled. “No, it’s okay, Callmas. I think I know how now.” She wrote the letter. It was approved. There was a graduation, and I watched my kid, my First Kid, graduate. Cheryl sailed through her master’s program, and told me she “rocked it” due to my literary criticism class. “I can talk Foucault with the best of them!” she proudly told me. She became a teacher, got married, had two beautiful kids, and has now, astoundingly, been teaching for 20 years, five years fewer than I have.

Year: 2020. The Spring of Covid-19. Schools on shut down. Everyone getting used to the “new abnormal.” Classes online. Duncan called, now Durant, I guess, now Cheryl, a colleague. “Nina,” she said, “what is our job right now as educators? How can we help the kids? What can we do?” I paused, reaching for my cigarettes and lighter and then pushing them away. “I don’t know, Cheryl. Tell them we hear them. Tell them we care. Show them community of caring, because they’re young, scared, confused, and they’ll remember that a lot more than any curriculum. And, by the way, you said you always wanted to be an educator like me. Has it occurred to you that I am the way I am because of you? You taught me to teach.”

I envision that young woman now—not so young, really—she’s 43, a grown-up lady. And I know what she’ll say to those students lucky enough to have her as their teacher. “Okay. Okay. Okay. It’s going to be okay. Let’s just take this first step.”

And so the motto of my college lives. Sic luceat lux vestra. And it does. It shines on. It only takes a match to light a fire. Duncan/Durant has become that fire. Shine on, you fiery kid. Shine on.

Lost Routine

By: Melissa Fritz

4 a.m. has become my new 11 p.m. The day comes and goes. I haven’t seen the sunlight in 18 days. I could go on a walk or sit outside and smell the flowers, but depression holds me captive to my bed. I sleep in until 1 p.m. begging my body to get back on a schedule. I remind myself of all the tasks I could be doing, I should be doing but somehow never find the time. Time is all I have but I seem to let it slip from my fingers.

My motivation to do anything has disappeared. I beat myself up over the tasks I didn’t complete, again, but I never seem to find the solution. I should be cleaning up around the house, eating healthier, working out, but somehow taking care of myself is the absolute last thing I want to do. I sit down to do my schoolwork and I stare blankly at the screen for hours before I just walk away. My body has become vacant. I check out of my mind and allow my days to fall together.

I’ve been rotating t-shirts for three weeks now. Haven’t worn a bra in a month and can’t even think about putting jeans on. Showering has become an afterthought because I can’t seem to find the ambition to get off of the couch. Brushing my hair is out of the question. It just sits in

a knot on top of my head. Frozen meals have been the easiest way to not starve and eating three cupcakes for a midnight snack is the only routine I've created.

I have FaceTime therapy at 1 p.m. every Wednesday, which is the only other interaction I get to the outside world. I feel too guilty to reschedule, even though I don't have much to say. The first thing she says is, "how's the week going for you?" I tell her it's fine, but she knows I'm not up for sharing. Her words sit with me for a few hours, and then I'm back into my own sad world. Mental breakdowns typically happen at night when the house is quiet except for my thoughts. I remind myself that I'm broken and then feel horrible that I can't fix it from bed. But I never get out of bed. The problems I had before just intensify and some nights I can't catch my breath.

I can't even remember what day it is. I take naps because sleeping is the only thing that calms my mind. I check the same social media apps over and over but refuse to text my friends back. I scroll through Instagram admiring people taking advantage of the time spent at home, and then hate myself for not reaching those standards. I complete homework assignments an hour before they are due, even though I had the entire day to finish it.

I spend my day thinking of everything I can't find the courage to do. I reminisce on the freedom I had and how it slowly withered away until it was gone. How the days started to strangle me, and I could no longer leave the house. I overwhelm myself with the thought that none of us knows when this will be over.

All I know is this bed and everything I am giving up to stay in it.

Friendship in a Time of Pandemic

By: Laura Reilly

I saw a meme online that said, "Maybe this whole virus is because someone with a monkey's paw made a wish that they'd have lots of time to play Animal Crossing."

I don't know if that's true, but I do know playing this game has made quarantine a whole lot more bearable.

I turned 35 last month, but I've hardly felt it because quarantine has thrown me right back to being in college, 15 years ago. Since I've switched my schedule to working afternoons and evenings, I stay up until 2, and get out of bed at 10:30. I can't go anywhere, so indeterminate lengths of time stretch out, waiting to be filled.

Just like when I was in college, I fill a lot of that time with Animal Crossing, though the game's latest installment far surpasses anything those original games could do.

I may be an introvert on steroids—some would say a recluse—but a government mandate to not go anywhere, and not gather, makes me want to do both, and virtually, I can.

Friends who live in different parts of the country—and even on different continents—play the game, too. I have plans to visit my friend Lolita's town, and she lives in the Philippines.

It isn't just my friends around the world I look forward to seeing, though. Seeing the animals who live on the island has replaced my daily interactions with my coworkers, the interactions I didn't realize I'd come so much to depend on.

Sure, talking with the kangaroo who lives down the hill about the glasses case that fell out of a tree, and hit her on the head, isn't exactly the same as discussing MLA guidelines with my officemates.

With everything so topsy-turvy, though, somehow, it makes perfect sense.

The Status of Rigatoni

By: Pyra Intihar

The old man looked up at me from beneath the brim of his light blue newsboy cap. With one hand on the cart and the other gesturing at the shelf behind him, he asked "Where's the rigatoni? You're all out of that, too?"

His voice held a defiant edge like I was hiding pasta in the backroom.

Brushing—*damp?*—hair from my eyes, I turned and stepped down the ladder. "You don't see any on the shelf?"

Am I sweating? I subtly sniffed my armpit.

The man pushed aside a few boxes. "I don't see anything."

Stepping to the floor, I quickly put the safety latch on the ladder and my best Walmart smile on my face. "Here, let me help you look."

After almost a full week's work, I was ready for spring break to end so I could get back to online teaching and be finished with all these extra hours I'd picked up at my part-time job. My body hurt from lifting heavy boxes all week while unpacking product and racing around the store to restock shelves.

Taking a few steps, my eyes quickly scanned the shelves.

"See. That's it?" His I-told-you-so rose at the end, like a question.

Between the blue and green boxes of pasta, empty spaces gaped like missing teeth. I searched for rigatoni but kept coming up with the same type of noodles: lasagna, shells, and angel hair pasta. *Never mind the rigatoni. Where did all the regular spaghetti go?*

Crouching to reach the bottom shelves, I looked for randomly misplaced product that sometimes sat behind other product and found two boxes of penne pasta, all the way in the back and turned sideways.

As I reached for them, a single idea pinged around like a pinball hitting the bumpers of my brain. Stored information about current events in China formed one bumper; our own closed U.S. borders formed another. The pinball bounced off what I'd seen in Walmart all week.

I'd watched the pitch of customer intensity rise since Monday. With each passing day, shoppers masked their fear with laughter and spoke disparagingly about the preppers and horders, while they themselves quickly grabbed bags of rice and beans. "I don't know why anyone's worried," some said. "It's all just a big media scare. They have us where they want us." Others said, "Just use common sense and wash your hands."

With both boxes in hand, I took a deep breath and looked down the aisle as I felt the crinkle in my knees while getting up.

The white glare from overhead LEDs bounced off the floor between customers and carts.

It was only two in the afternoon.

There were never this many people out shopping at two o'clock on a Thursday afternoon.

The words flashed in my mind: *Corona Panic*.

The old man cleared his throat. "So, what's the status of the rigatoni?" His blue eyes pierced like light from a lighthouse set amid wrinkled skin, brown age spots, and sagging eyes. He looked defeated beneath his light blue cap.

"Scuse me?" I asked.

"What do I tell my wife?" His eyes wobbled back and forth unsteadily as he searched my eyes for an answer.

I cleared my throat, lifting the damp hair off my neck with one hand and holding out the two boxes of penne with the other, "I would tell her we are out right now. I don't know when we are getting any more. But, we do have this. Penne is a great pasta. It'll probably work with her recipe."

He took the boxes from my hands and warily eyed the contents through the film on the front of each package. "If that's all you've got..." His voice trailed off as he put one box in his cart and handed the other back to me.

I set the remaining box randomly on the shelf. At this point, I didn't even care which spot I set it in or whether the price label information matched the product. That last box of penne would be gone before I could even get my scanner to find its proper location. Of that, I was certain.

I turned back to my ladder-cart and unlatched the safety pin.

"Excuse me, miss?"

I turned around.

A heavy-set Hispanic woman stepped toward me, looking at a piece of paper in one hand while waving a pen in the other. "Miss?" she asked, her purse slipping off her shoulder and tangling in her long black hair. She struggled for a moment to get it untangled and then asked with a heavy sigh, "Is this all the pasta you have left? And what about tomato sauce? I can't find *any* tomato sauce."

Corona's Chaos

By: Lydia Stewart

You started as a whisper
from somewhere far away,
another thing to ignore,
not something here to stay.

How clever you are!
You proved us all wrong.
Here you are now,
still going strong.

You've taken so much,
too much to name.
So many moments in time
will never be the same.

The highest toll yet
still remains lives.
Yet nowhere near satisfied
is your appetite.

You're a master at weaving
fear through our hearts.
Even those most hopeful
are left worried and lost.

We're stuck in our homes
while you're out to play.
Oh Covid-19,
please go away!

High Risk

By: Abbey Marquess

His fingers wrap around the device,
sliding across the smooth plastic.
The rigid silicone buttons shift anxiously in their pegs.
The calluses on his thumb, hovering
over the power button.
After a moment of pause, indecision,
calculation,
he stamps his warm finger down on the soft switch,
leaving an imprint on his skin.

Light blinds him from across the room.
His eyes shift away from the light
as time tops the hour.
Suddenly, a crescendo of noise erupts
from the speakers.
His fingers fumble anxiously over the volume keys.
A deep tenor rumbles over the music,
announcing the likelihood of destruction,

and disruption.

But above all, the risk of death
for the immunocompromised
can not be stressed enough.
The alarming words echo in his mind
over and over and over again.

With sweaty palms,
he darts his eyes around the room.
His gaze lands on his wife,
and tears gather,
because he knows his highest risk
is becoming a widower.

I S O L A T I O N

By: Claire Davis

Independently
Surrendering
Our
Lives
After
This
Incident
Overlaps
Nations

Inside,
Stuck.
Overwhelmingly
Lonely.
Ambitiously
Thinking
I've
Overcome
Negativity.

Incredulous
Situation,
Operant
Liberation.

Appreciative
That
I'm
Optimizing
Nature.

Take a breath
take it day by day
hour by hour
We all will bloom and see the flowers.

Insanity

By: Madilynne Fischer

If insanity runs like water
then I hope my glass overflows.
The two-story brick building
never felt like home.
 I draw back the curtains
for the sun to dry up the puddle that stirs my mind.
 I open the windows
and the wind whispers secrets.
 I don't open the door.
 I don't go outside.
For fear that the sun will fade,
or the wind will get laryngitis.

What happens if I drown?
What if the glass begins to flood,
who will save me?
 Six feet never felt like much
 for a woman shackled with anxiety.
But the two-story brick building
never felt like home.
And now six feet begins to ache
like the miles I've walked
to pour the water down the drain.

The Dissociation of Isolation

By: Bonnie Shinn

The world
has become withered
& I feel myself
faltering as well.
Numbness infiltrates me
as numbers rise
and we
 begin
 to
 fall

At home,
I sit,
nose pressed to glass
watching as the world wilts away
& I am left
feeling helpless
 & distant
 & restless.

Each time I leave
my temporary prison,
I wear cloth
tight across my face,
hoping this invisible creature
won't sneak in
& steal away with
 my essence.

Or worse,
cling to me silently,
only to slither to another
when it sees fit,
mercilessly destroying many
it its wake.
The world has
 become
 exhausting.

I no longer want to see
people fading away
& those above privileged enough
to choose not to help.
I just want

this nightmare
to dissolve.

Untitled

By: Joseph Coogan

I walk to get away from people,
To escape the noise,
Responsibilities and homework,
Not to mention chores.

When I walk, there's just me and music
Blasting in my ear,
The same few songs over and over.
I like it that way.

In my head, it's all fantasy scenes,
Spaceships and magic,
Stuff I want to write about later,
Some that's just for me.

There's a person. I should keep distance.
To the other side
Of the road I go, avoiding cars.
There's more people there!

What about a pandemic makes everyone want to go outside?

On the sidewalk,
Keep my distance.
Walk on the grass,
Keep my distance.
Smile and wave,
Keep my distance.

There's a person I recognize.
My stepmom's walking.
I shouldn't be surprised; this route's hers
To get away to.

I'm bored of walking.

There are too many people to dodge.
Going back inside.
Maybe I should find some new music.

Art



Busy Bee

By: Cheyenne Burns



Left to Rot

By: Erin Lockhart



Manoas's Oasis *(By: Sydney Clark)*



Spooky Snow

By: Sydney Clark