

# CALLIOPE

#REMEMBERCALLIOPE



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# CALLIOPE

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VOLUME XXXV

ULTIMUS

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# POETRY

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THE ELEMENTS  
AMBER STICKNEY

I said, "there's nothing left to write"

You said, "make it new"

Words attract and form to your mouth, like charged ions, I enviously want them on  
my page, but they choose not me, but you

God, why do you always have to be right?

Your fingers are branches of lightning as they graze my arm, I feasibly attempt to  
engulf each joule of energy, while they shock me, but the results are trite

Inspiring muse, your gait is so loose, your words are as sweet as vermouth, stay at  
my place tonight, you'll be my center view

At midnight, you dissipate, off to impassion some other hopeless hopeful, while I  
placate myself in your leftover hue

# THE BINDING OF ISSAC: 1969

PAMELA REYNOLDS

And God said, *"Take your son."*

*"My son?"*

*"Isaac whom you love."*

And one by one the draft pellets were pulled,  
bitter pills of paper,  
birthday after birthday opened and read.  
The dates burned into the ears of mothers  
who did not conceive for sacrifice.

*"Offer him as a burnt offering."*

*"But Sarah-"*

*"On the height that I will point out to you."*

*"What shall I tell Sarah? "*

He could tell her nothing satisfying  
when her un-deferred son was  
called number one.  
He tried faith, he tried honor,  
he tried duty  
while she plotted trips to Canada,  
trading chance with fugitive, and  
schemed to scar her unblemished child  
to be unfit for the altar.

*In the darkness before dawn  
while Sarah slept, they set out  
with wood, firestone and knife.  
When Abraham saw the place from afar,  
he trembled with doubt, wedged  
between flesh and spirit.*

And her son traveled for a long duration  
with guns, artillery, and tanks  
while she pleaded with every breath that he  
not be meant for burnt offering.  
But the ram only appears for some.

# TASTE OF SALT

HANNAH BRYAN

Childhood stories of growing up in Brooklyn, going to Coney Island, she walked along the pier, tasting salty treats like crinkled french fries and corn dogs.

Longing to go sample this heritage along with the taste and smell of salt, I brought my boyfriend.

He had never been to Coney Island, had never been to Brooklyn or New York at all.

We walked along the pier, had crinkled cut french fries and beer.

I shared this with him this memory.

We rode the Wonder Wheel with the sliding cars that shot you into the ocean, sparkling.

I saw the ghostly iconic structure of the legendary Parachute Drop, its abandoned structure left standing like an eerie monument. We tried everything—tasted and rode everything—well, almost everything.

There was still the Cyclone, the famous Cyclone roller coaster my mother had told me about. When I saw it, I ran! Holding him by the hand, practically dragging him up to where the line started, he begged me to let him skip it. “I’ll stay down here and take pictures!” he offered in bargain. “You’re coming!” I said and then got settled into the car, gleaming.

With a snort of laughter, he heaved to get the restraint down.

A guy came over to push it down with his foot.

“Hey, I need some help ova heah, this guy’s too big!”

With the help of two others, they squished him in, safely.

The ride tore forward

winding sharply, taking quick heaves and dips.

Giggling and screaming insanely, I felt a tight grip on my hand.

Turning I saw his eyes bulging, his mouth pressed hard into a line.

The coaster stopped, he was pulled out, coughing and sputtering, a thin red rivulet streaming down the side of his mouth.

Another scream, this one different from a few moments before.

A sharp turn had cracked a rib, puncturing a lung.  
He left not on the subway, but on a stretcher.  
Some people have drowned at Coney Island,  
but in the ocean, not by the blood in their lungs.

When I went back to Coney Island again years later, I went alone, and I stood on the shore. As I smelled the sea air and the scent of dead fish, I felt pressure behind my eyes along with a faint tickle streaming down my cheeks. And I tasted salt.

# MOTHER'S ILK

## ELEANOR BRYANT

I am not the life you never had-  
a ghost ship-  
something waved to the horizon.

I am not your Atlas.

I will not hoist your hurt for you - place it on my shoulders.

I can't hold you until my nails crack and peel back,

exposing the softest part of me

until I bleed more than my share, and

we're all bleeding for you, and

is that what you wanted?

I am not the ox or the yoke.

I am not a Russian doll.

To what end was my creation?

Was I not the convulsion of love,

a crepuscular gasping conclusion,

where two hearts cleaved?

I am not my sister's bare rib-caged sickness.

I am not your convalescing father.

I am not the darkness you fight in metered doses.

I am not an open ended question...

I am flesh and the darkest of blood,

heavier than all of God's water: the muddied Ogeechee.

I am more than a bank riddled with mosquitos and gators and moccasins.

I am more than all of your failures.

I am salty to the touch.

I am my fake teeth, my fat rolls, my crooked fingers.

I am my fucked up feet.

I am the abandoned left margin.

I am the Dead Sea-

I am your Daughter,

and I can't float you any longer.

# JUNE MARCH

## BRENT GILLENWATER

A pleasure stepping forward  
For her, a she, just another  
In a sea of faces fair  
Don't treat her like  
Countenance means  
"Free ticket to anywhere,"  
Because that's got to be dull  
Praised for figure, for face, for hair

But the mind, if one has  
She asks between-line:  
Can beauty really be  
All they want from me?  
Or so I imagine, the moment  
This damsel alights  
In huff, on stool, nearly  
End-Witted

To the rescue, but  
Did anyone ask the damsel  
If rescued was  
What she wanted to be?  
Another ticket for free  
Even if this he  
Offered to she  
For pleasure, not beauty

With all due respect  
Was carriage extended  
And the hour when  
Pumpkins would normally perish  
Made moot by makeshift prince  
And since, ignorant of slippers  
He asked to be paid  
In the currency of company



June marched mysteriously where  
The he could not guess, for a year  
And when finally her form he beheld  
She wore nothing but a door  
How surprised was he to see  
Damsel regally splendored, on floor  
She who speechless, with gracious sir

# MOONLIGHT

## DARROW FRASER

In the moonlight,  
black boys look blue.  
When the sun  
takes a bow  
giving the moon  
its limelight,  
shining for hours.

As do we.  
Bathed in melanin,  
we are highly favored.

The sun  
gives us no breaks  
from its loving embrace,  
but the moon watches over us  
&  
gives us confidence & strength.  
The moon  
gives us new identities.  
We are no longer  
hidden in the shadows  
of society's  
eurocentric version of beauty.  
We are beauty. We are blue.

# VOICES

NANCY SMITH

I've been writing for as long as I can remember.  
There was never anything as soothing as pen on paper.

Since age 5,  
I could count the voices in my mind  
somewhere between 1,000 and 9,  
screaming at me that they didn't want to hide.

It took 3 years 'til I could let them out,  
and by then my brain had crushed my heart.  
Now I'm always full of doubt  
because the voices had convinced me I shouldn't be too loud  
or too proud  
of myself,  
of my accomplishments,  
of all the times I've tried.

Instead I cried and punished myself for not being just right,  
for not having smaller thighs,  
for not being desensitized.  
Every night they told the same lies.

It took 15 years to realize this wasn't right  
because I was just trying to survive,  
but the voices can't see the light that beams from my eyes  
or the fire that grows deep inside.  
The brighter I get, the more they die.

Now there is silence, and I am alone.  
I wonder if I did the right thing by letting them go.

Since age 5,  
the voices had given me that fire,  
passion, and drive to create and write.

A part of me feels like I owe them my life.

# SENSE MY LOVE

## ELIJAH CLARKE

If Love had a color,  
it would be white,  
and as empty as my family's lies.

If Love had a taste,  
it would taste of tears,  
the same tears I drank when my cousin told the family my secret.

If one could touch Love,  
it would feel cold or even freezing,  
like that chill New Year's night that my cousin called my uncle, and my uncle called  
my auntie, and my auntie called my grandma, and my grandma called my mother,  
and no one called me.

If Love had a sound,  
It would sound of the words  
"You're going to hell."

If Love had a smell,  
it would smell of carbon monoxide,  
from a black Dodge, Journey being left on in a garage with one lone boy inside  
of it.

# CRIES OF PASSION: 2.3.18

## RAMSEY REYNOLDS

I feel love.

I feel it so deep in my trembling body, I  
tremble more in its immense presence.

And yet, I find myself in the face of love,  
losing,  
so slowly,  
the parts of myself that make me  
lovable.

Like drowning,

I see your face and smile.

I smile as I'm drug under,  
ever plunging into my own murky  
mind,

swallowing the words of our love like a  
life force,

and finding peace within myself,  
fleeting as it may be.

The pressure surmounts to an  
unfathomable amount.

It squeezes me dry,  
every confession,  
every memory,  
every feeling.

Baby, I swear it,

I am fine.

This is fine.

I break surface and expel from my  
swollen body every doubt or lie I let  
pass my lips into yours.

We are not hopeless;

I am not.

Or until I lose my grip on you and am  
pulled under once again.

The cycle repeats.

*I love you.*

Cycle repeats.

*I love you.*

Repeats:

*I love you.*



# HOW MANY YEARS DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHTBULB

KARTER DREHER

You're just a fucking light bulb that's about to go out,  
but you aren't one of those that can just go out like you're supposed to.  
You flicker on and off indecisively.  
It reminds me of my dorm room sophomore year,  
when the lights wouldn't blow  
but just dim  
and spastically flicker on for short periods of time,  
or sometimes long ones.  
Sometimes they'd stay on for a couple days  
but never longer.  
They'd stay on just long enough to make us think that somehow they'd magically  
fixed themselves,  
just long enough that you'd miss them  
when they flickered out again.  
My friends would always tell me I ought to put in a maintenance request,  
and I'd agree,  
but that'd be the end of it.  
I'd never actually do anything about it;  
I was too lazy.  
I figured that acknowledging the problem was enough.  
They say that's the first step, after all.  
Eventually I just stopped noticing it, or at least I pretended I'd stopped.  
I'd look at the new light bulbs every time I'd go to the store.  
I'd think about how nice it would be if I didn't see your flickerings anymore.  
"Another day,"  
I tell myself.  
"When I have more cash, or more this, or more that."  
Excuses.  
Excuses.  
Excuses.  
I think a little part of me liked the flickering at first.

It reminded me that you were still there,  
but now it just gives me a migraine;  
I hate it.  
I want the flickering gone.  
I'm gonna take the lightbulb out  
even though I don't have a bulb to replace it yet,  
because I'd rather sit in the dark than deal with your flickering any longer.

# DEAR HURRICANE

## NEIL MADRID

Dear Hurricane,  
I thought I loved the rain.  
You left me in scattered showers  
with thunder lasting hours.  
Gusty winds and heavy rain.  
You're beautiful; I can't explain.

Water streaming down the creeks  
like the way they fall down my cheeks.  
The storms will stop; the rains will pass.  
I'll clean up the broken glass.

Dear Hurricane,  
I thought I loved the rain.  
You left me in scattered showers,  
the tears falling from my eyes.  
How long? Time, please learn to fly.  
I wonder, how long do I have to cry?

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# CREATIVE NONFICTION

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The title "LILLIAN SPENCER AWARD-WINNER" is centered at the top. The words "LILLIAN SPENCER" are in a serif font, with "LILLIAN" in blue and "SPENCER" in red. Below them, "AWARD-WINNER" is in a similar serif font, with "AWARD-" in blue and "WINNER" in red. The text is flanked by two golden laurel branches that curve upwards and outwards, framing the title.

# LILLIAN SPENCER AWARD-WINNER

KABUL CHAUFFER  
JOSHUA WINSLOW

Stoic, perhaps borderline grim, a stream of men began to pass, all be-decked in traditional Afghan garb. Every other pair of sandaled feet carried an edifice of honor and age interwoven in a manner unique to Afghan men who have lived through war with two global superpowers and every other neighbor to boot. A palmed Nokia or two betrayed the procession, which otherwise seemed so clearly to belong to a place outside of time. For them I imagined a background of wide deserts, mountain horizons, and dusty street scenes. My own imaginings aside, I knew the place they came from to be “all that” and so much more, more garbage, more mud, more poverty, all that might fill a nation torn apart by war and peopled by a population of which few will ever join the men passing now. My own gaze was joined by that of another hundred Afghans, all intently waiting to fill in the seats just vacated by the men in front of us. Oblivious to the contrast carried with them, the newcomers dispersed like liquid into the glossy bustle of Dubai International Airport’s Terminal One with its McDonalds, sushi bars, Irish pub, and all.

The digital Arabic letters above the departure gate flashed into English, “KANDAHAR - KABUL”, as if it were normal for a commercial flight to stop at two locations on one ticket. Joining the Afghans returning home, plastic-wrapped packages and duty free bags in tow, were myself and a handful of other westerners bound for business across the Persian Gulf and in Afghanistan. We all shared a glance and a nod as seats were taken and overhead bins stuffed. For my part, I took pride in looking somewhat ambiguous, no labels, no bright colors, nothing that suggests I’m anything other than a traveler. If anyone asks, I’m merely a writer hoping to tell a story or two in this part of the world. My peers with decidedly lighter skin seem less inclined to abstruseness. Camouflaged backpacks and ball caps which should have elicited a cringe in Dubai seemed staggeringly absurd aboard a plane to Kabul. One yokel chose to wear an “ISAF - OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM” t-shirt to go along with his “INFIDEL”-patched, multicam ball cap perched above his stupid, pink, goateed face as if we weren’t traveling through a part of the world where you might not want to advertise yourself as

part of an ongoing conflict. I nodded to him just the same, saving my frustration for the breaths to follow.

With only one in three seats filled, we left the modern world and all its refined comforts behind. Sleep came quickly without any in-flight entertainment available. I awoke to see nothing but brown below, but brown in a million separate hues as if a million identical twins sought to have their hair cut in different ways to make themselves distinguishable. We arrived in Kabul at night, a cool and dusty haze hovering over the city. Passport control could be a pain; my bags might be scrutinized, especially heavy by the border guards who, no doubt, have a unique opportunity with me to confiscate something valuable or elicit a little bit of bak-sheesh money. Somehow I breeze through, past my western counterparts and most of the Afghans ahead. I'm not even sure if I've done all I'm supposed to do, but I've got my bags and the exit is ahead, anyway. I leave the sagging ceilings and shouting guards behind to step out into the night's chill. As I pace towards the exit I ponder the death of two American contractors here a month prior. Employed by Olive Group as private security, two men had left the same terminal I was now exiting into the same night air awaiting, only to be gunned down in the open. I had no weapon, no radio, and no contact with a nearby base, embassy, or anyone else with the means to ensure my safety. To make matters worse, upon looking out at the ground ahead, I noticed no cover, no concealment from the exit to the single gated entry 200 meters ahead through the dark.

No one else from the plane had joined me. Surely there were taxis outside, though all I could see was the white beard of a single guard, pale blue uniform, and a worn AK-47 lending a man long past his prime the role of someone who might provide security to the site. He seemed disinterested in me, in the ground ahead of him, in everything really. I paced the empty pavement ahead in a manner I imagined wouldn't appear rushed or particularly slow. My contact was supposed to have a sign for me in his window. He didn't. It was only when I approached a group of waiting vehicles, any one of which might contain a driver intrepid enough to snatch an unarmed westerner for the prospect of a hefty ransom payment. Hell, maybe one of these men lost someone to a Russian thirty years ago, or one of my own fellows in the decade of conflict that preceded this particular arrival. The imagination doesn't have to look far to find reasons why I might be wanted for the sins of empires passed along with those of my own.

The snub nose of a short barreled AK-47 flashes in the amber light and an Afghan in his middle 50's gestures me towards his truck. He knows my name; he carries a company ID and tag in the dash of the vehicle. It doesn't matter that



I've never seen him before and no one has told me what to expect other than "a company vehicle will be waiting for you." My relaxed approach masks anything but, for everything is measured, and for all the uncertainty of it, this fellow is likely who I am supposed to ride with. There is no alternative, anyhow. I settle into the backseat among what passed for small talk in broken English. A phone is passed to me; I confirm my own identity and set off towards a safe house for the night. As the streetlights alternate the interior between darkness and dull light, I notice a blood lined ring in the back of the plate carrier worn by the armed Afghan in front of me. Behind the hole sits an unmarked plate of armor, the blood a grim reminder of its predecessor's efficacy. Whomever wore the vest before this guy had a bad day, if not his last day, but it's all small talk and smiles as we navigate the city. I noted the lack of armor, communications, weapons, and backup as we drove through the night. I thought again about the two Americans shot dead outside of the airport. Did it happen on the steps of the exit, by the old guards' gate or maybe among the bunch of vehicles gathered to pick up arrivals? If anyone had asked that question, it hadn't been reported anywhere. Only uniformed deaths are talked about at this point, anyhow. Never-mind that over half of the personnel making up the ISAF effort in Afghanistan are now private contractors, most of us prior service. Regardless of what uniform they once wore, the two dead outside of Kabul International Airport were forgotten by all but their family and those of us following in their literal footsteps.

I did enter to win a McLaren in the Dubai airport, though. I wonder who got that thing in the end.

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# F I C T I O N

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# LIFT

BRENT GILLENWATER

Their eyes opened to the cloudless sea of air. That endless, unknowable expanse of blue was like a first lover. Cherished. Sacred. A well from which they drew their first breath, and with it came innocence. It was a moment of perfect weightlessness and it...

Passed.

They were three.

In their first moment they knew what it was to be whole, secure, without care or worry.

In the next, gravity ripped it like a pacifier from an infant's gums.

Know unadulterated panic.

Know fear.

Know despair, helplessness, then loneliness.

In seven seconds it was clear; if their sheer desperation was power enough to produce a savior, they wouldn't need one. Begging the universe is no reason for the universe to obey.

It was then that they saw each other. Two others, equally helpless, doomed to lose their own eyes, their unique perspective, knowing nothing more than the tragic certainty they would never have that first lover again.

Two of them were alike in form, though amidst the adrenaline and anguish, they did not think of it. Their bodies were bulkier than the third, their features square, and because their limbs were strong, they clawed at the air as if the effort would somehow provide an escape.

The third was slenderer with rounded features. She could not know the otherness of her body, but she hadn't their raw strength and quickly gave up that violent dance.

She watched their faces contort, their teeth as they snapped at the air, and each other. Just barely she heard their howling and snarling through the screaming wind and watched them trying to strike each other as if they might alleviate their

pain if only they could inflict it upon another.

They were terrible to look upon, and she found that the sight hurt her deep inside. Her anguish became that much greater, and in her innocence, thought she was taking some of theirs away. It hurt, but she knew she could stand more. This pain was not like the air pummeling her naked body. She could stand it, but could she take all of it? She would do it if it destroyed her, if it meant their relief.

But how?

She opened herself to receive it, to draw it in. She spread her arms with every muscle.

Her body snapped forward with stabbing pain, the shock darting across every nerve. The whiplash was blinding, pain so intense it strangled thoughts and senses. A single whisper rippled through her mind telling her that she'd done it; she'd taken their pain into herself, and it was worth it.

When she could open her eyes, her companions were nowhere. They were up, she hoped, where they would find solace once more. She could not see them above, but surely ...

She still fell, but gently now. The air did not beat at her flesh. She could sense the sky's fingers trailing around and through her.

Those were not there before. Or rather, she had not noticed them. They were just another part of her, drawn in to protect herself from whatever pulled her away from the beginning, but now they reached out to either side. They fluttered, their many little parts, brushing the passing air and each other. She sensed them, sensed through them like thousands of fingers weaving a living tapestry that told the story of her movement. She drifted through pockets of air: warmer, cooler, denser, lifting her or dropping.

She felt a moment of giddiness and spread her wings as far as she could. She stood nearly motionless in the sky. The push of air against her ears grew quiet. She opened her eyes once more to the endless, unknowable expanse of blue and drew deep from its well.

# THE TOTAL ECLIPSE

## CHARITY WILLIAMS

“Don’t forget to watch the total eclipse this afternoon,” the news anchor on the television said. “You wouldn’t want to miss it.”

The TV suddenly went black, and I looked over at my grandmother who set the remote down beside her. I sighed and drank from the tall glass of lemonade that she had made for me. We were sitting in the living room wiping sweat from our foreheads as a fan blew hot air over us.

“I don’t want you to go watch that eclipse,” my grandmother warned me from her wooden chair. The chair made creaking noises as she rocked back and forth.

“Grandma, it’s not going to hurt me,” I said wiping the sweat that dripped from the sides of my face on the back of my hand. I got up. “Why are you so scared of an eclipse?”

My grandmother pointed her finger at me and looked me in the eye. For just a second I was scared, and I didn’t know why. “That thing is evil.”

“You have nothing to worry about,” I shook my head and looked down at my watch. I had set a timer that counted down the minutes until the eclipse. It was at one minute. I crossed over to the front door and looked back at my grandmother. She shook her head disappointingly and took a sip from her glass of lemonade. My hand gripped the handle of the door. I could feel my heart racing in my chest, and I yanked the door open to reveal a white bright light shining over the lawn. I stepped outside. Our next-door neighbor, Randy, was outside too. I waved at him; he waved back.

“Ready?” he yelled out to me.

I nodded and turned my attention to the sky. I watched in awe. It was a wonder. The moon was about to cover the sun to bring about darkness. I was going to witness the creation of night in the middle of the day. It was like nature was playing tricks, and I had gotten a front row seat. While some, like myself and our neighbor, marveled at the quirks of nature, others, like my grandmother, feared the eclipse. But even with my grandmother’s doubts and concerns in the back of my mind, I couldn’t tear my eyes away from it. I couldn’t look away if I wanted to. Along with the rest of the world, I couldn’t help but look directly at it.

I shuddered and looked behind my shoulder. It felt as if someone had whispered into my ear, but no one was standing behind me. I looked back up at the sky.

“Five...four...three...two...,” Randy counted down as I shielded my eyes with my hands. My eyes were starting to burn at how bright the last bits of the sun were, but I kept looking. “One.”

Something started to happen. I had gotten it all wrong. This wasn’t a wonder. It was something more twisted, a perversion into the day. As I stared at the dark sky, the silence was peaceful first, but the silence became alarming as I realized everything was moving. Things around me were changing. The trees seemed to dance in the dark with their long-limbed legs, and shadows played across the lawn in a giddy manner. The night creatures emerged from the cracks and corners of the earth and began to parade over the grounds, no longer held back by the light. They were free. They had finally gotten their time in the spotlight, and we were prisoners to the darkness. I looked over at my neighbor, and he had a startled look on his face.

“Randy?” I called out to him. “What’s going on? Where’s the sun?”

“Get in the house!” Randy yelled. “Now!”

He ran back inside, so did I. I shut the door behind me and leaned my head against the door taking deep breaths. I didn’t understand what was going on.

“Grandma, you were right. Something’s not-”

But the wooden chair that she was sitting in was empty.

“Grandma?” I called out to her, but she didn’t answer. She never did.

It turned out my grandmother was right. I should have listened to her when she said that the eclipse was evil. It was evil, and it had brought something with it.

I am sure my grandmother didn’t become a prisoner like the rest of us. I think she went somewhere where the light never disappeared while we were bound to a black earth. But somehow, she had managed to leave behind something for me. A small part of her light remained with me and kept me alive in what was now a world that belonged to the darkness.



# A DEBT UNPAID

JAMES HARDIN

The moon perched high upon its branch in the dark night sky. The stars were out with all their make-up on. They glittered and glistened, but the moon's celestial glow outshined the radiance of even the proudest of stars. Its light pierced through the most tightly enclosed of treetops and thrust its spotlight onto the most widely scattered of leaves canvassing the forest floor. Heavy oaken limbs gently swayed in the wind. The persistent, gentle rustle of foliage rubbing against itself lulled through the air like white noise.

Dried leaves and dead sticks cracked and crunched underneath the soles of Damien's feet as he walked through the forest. The intermittent beams of moonlight that cast through the gaps of the canopy became mini spotlights that showered the long forgotten trails that his feet gave a sense of remembered purpose to.

"I'm not goin' back. Why would I go back? Why does everyone think that it's okay to treat me like that?" Damien muttered as he straightened the straps of his backpack upon his shoulders. "I'll show them. They won't forget this. I don't need them. I don't need any of them. I bet they haven't figured out that I'm gone yet. I don't have any missing texts. Really shows me how much they care. See if I ever fuckin' come back." Damien whispered as he wiped a solemn tear from his cheek.

The overgrown path that Damien was treading on quickly became a fork in the road. A distinct pair of paths lay before him. The breeze in the air gently rolled underneath the canopy and drifted beneath his nose, carrying a sweet scent of lavender upon its wings. Damien decided to flip a coin to determine his path. Heads would mean he takes the left path and tails would indicate the right path. He reached into his pants pocket and pulled out a patina-coated quarter that he'd been holding on to for some time. He fumbled with it for a moment before tossing it into the air. Heads.

Damien took a deep breath and began to walk upon the left trail. He'd never come this far into the Morkot Forest before, but a feeling in his stomach told him that it was already too late to turn around. Damien's chest ached with panic. He thought about the bridges he was burning by leaving this way. He wasn't yet sure if he should care. He wasn't sure if he should carry on. He looked down at his feet. He decided he couldn't go back after the way they'd made him feel.

Damien stopped his stride suddenly. He looked up to the leaves and branches that hid the sky above him. He could see the moonlight peering through, begging to be seen.

“What a wonderful night,” he said only to himself. “What a wonderful night for a bridge fire.” He chuckled as he put his right foot ahead of his left while straining his eyes to fight back the tears.

Damien walked for hours. He felt the consistent pulse of soreness echoing from within the soles of his feet with every step. He decided that he needed to rest for a couple minutes, at least. He wasn’t in a hurry anymore because he didn’t know where he was going. Damien set his backpack down and collapsed against a thick tree for a moment to breathe easy, and he pulled out a sandwich that he’d packed prior to his departure. He chomped down onto it and tried to satiate his hunger. His mind began to wander. Before, he was consumed with the insatiable rage of feeling mistreated, but now the thought of the black of night began to creep upon his mind. The digital clock on his cell phone read 3:36 a.m. Calculations began to take place. He ran a mile in his high school gym class in fifteen minutes. Four hours had elapsed since he’d embarked. Considering his brisk walking speed, he figured a mile per forty minutes. That sent a chill down his spine. He was equal to or more than six miles into the Morkot Forest, and that didn’t mean anything good to him.

Previously, he was too fixated on his issues back home to even consider his surroundings. Damien began to take an inventory and catalogued the sounds and smells around him. His sight no longer carried its weight, like an unreliable tenant unable to pay its rent. That’s when he first heard it. A deep vibrating growl that slid through the air around him. A resounding grumble made the leaves around him sway as if they had been pushed by the breeze. It sent a shiver up his spine. Damien froze. His eyesight dulled, and his hearing sharpened. A force within him shifted gears. He was no longer taking a walk in the forest; he was in a state of fierce and resilient survival. Damien maintained a statuesque pose for minutes on end. He felt his stomach twist and tremble at the sound.

“Get a hold of yourself.” He murmured to himself as he pounded his chest a few times in an effort to prime his flesh machine for the task at hand.

It had no effect. Damien felt the sort of primal fear that courses through the veins of someone who knows they’re playing with fire. Damien coughed and held his gut. He spit to the side, onto the ground. He tried to spit out his fear. He tried to spit out his reservations.

He knew he had to move on and keep walking forward, so he did against all instinct. The sound drew him closer. It felt like his body had turned against him in a state of hypnosis, as if a pheromone drifted through the air and a chemical response pulled him in. Damien pulled back a fan of brush and his eyes feasted upon its sight a beast of gigantic proportion. He'd never seen anything like it in his life on television or in the textbooks, not even in his imagination. His pupils constricted in fear as if to try and hide themselves. The closest thing he could liken it to was a wolf. It appeared to Damien to be very much asleep. It slept like a dog might: its front legs were posed frontward on both sides of its head and its hind legs out to the side. A single fang stuck out from its upper lip and was burrowed in the ground. The tooth was the size of Damien's entire body. The beast's flaxen coat was emerald green in hue. The fur on the sides of the creature's face and the top of its head stuck out like what Damien thought to be a lion's mane. Damien slowly let go of the brush and began to backpedal. He would not die here, not like this. He began to walk away at a brisk pace. Adrenaline had already begun to course through his veins. His body responded to the sight better than his mind was able to. He was about half an hour's walk away from the creature when he froze at the sound of a voice speaking to him.

"Halt." The voice rumbled powerfully through the forest. It shook the trees around him like a thunderclap. Damien held his breath and didn't move a single muscle.

"Tarry naught. I knoweth thou art th're. I feeleth the trees quiv'ring 'round thee. Cometh to me else I tearith this landeth asund'r and findeth thee. Thee doth not wanteth yond. I assureth thee."

The voice felt like hot, black tar sliding slowly down, and burning, Damien's scalp. It echoed in a place that felt incapable of an echo. It was corrosive. It made the ground tremble and the plants quake. It was unlike anything that school had ever prepared him for. He was both confused and afraid of the voice. It undermined every instinct he had, and yet he felt compelled to adhere to it. It didn't feel like a voice. It wasn't a whisper. It was a force of nature. His cells obeyed it. It felt like the moonlight and the branches shaking in the air. It was a sound that compromised every sense of life that he'd ever grown to accept as reality. His mind rattled around the possibility of its presence.

Damien began to walk toward the voice, toward the site of discovery. His feet were full of lead. He didn't want to go, but he knew that no other choice lay ahead of him. Finally, he was upon that single fan of brush that he earlier pulled away to see the beast.

"Th're thou art. Cometh clos'r." The voice rumbled from the beast as its mouth was closed. Damien saw that the creature's mouth was closed as it spoke to him. "I seeth thou art did frighten. Relaxeth. I couldst killeth thee at any moment. I am simply curious. Thee possesseth a familiar scent. A scent I rememb'r. One yond wast closeth to me."

"Hel-lo," Damien stuttered to the beast.

"So thee knoweth how to communicateth" the voice echoed.

"Yeah...I do," Damien said.

"Alloweth me to f'rma'ly introduceth thyself. I am Rockë." Rockë formed with his monstrously large lips. They moved with a surprising agility to shape syllables.

Damien shuddered from Rockë's speech and mustered his strength: "Look, sir, I didn't mean to come over here. I was just walking through the forest in a fit of desperation. I wasn't thinking about where I was heading. I'll just go ahead and start walking back that way." Damien spoke quickly as he turned and began to walk away.

"Desp'ration?" Rockë's voice wove through the trees shaking them to their roots. Damien froze in place. "This is the first timeth in over a hundr'd year yond I has't hath heard this w'rd. Bid me. What is thy nameth and what is thy desp'ration? I doth not und'rstand this w'rd."

"I'm so sorry that I walked into your part of the woods."

"Silence. Apologies shall doth thee nay help. Wherefore art thee h're?"

"I cannot understand you. What are you?"

"I am the Keepeth'r of the Wood. The Guardian of the F'rest. The Single-Fang'd Fiend Slayeth'r. I am the Protecteth'r of all yond exists in these woodlands and all yond shall existeth. I am the reasoneth f'r fireflies and the reasoneth yond trees falleth," the creature said nobly.

"Um. Well, my name is Damien of the Jones-eth!" Damien nervously shouted.

"I und'rstand not thy speech. I doth not und'rstand thy dialect!" Rockë raised his voice.

"I'm sorry but I don't speak in the same manner as you do, but I will try my best to translate. My-eth nam-eth is-eth Damien-eth," he said, hoping to appease.

*Hahaha. That was a miserable attempt, two-legs. I am Rockë, the Single Fanged Fiend Slayer.*

Damien froze and held his breath. The voice echoed from within his mind. It felt like someone dropped ice cubes down the back of his shirt. It felt heavy on him like a cannonball.

*Let go. Relax.* The voice echoed.

"Stop! What are you doing?!" Damien yelled at the enormous creature as he clutched the sides of his head with outstretched hands.

*I won't even try to use linguistic form of communication with you. It's stupid and seeing as you don't speak the same tongue that I've grown accustomed to, there's really no point.*

"Please!" Damien shouted with his eyes bulging wide.

The pain spiked and singed into his mind. It left tracks and connected synapses like nothing had ever before. The veins in his eyes pulsed around his irises as his voice became constricted, hoarse, and panicked.

"Stop!" he screamed, squeezing his skull and writhing in agony as this new sensation ricocheted and cascaded through his frontal lobe.

*Ease yourself, whelp. You are with me. There is nothing in this world that could hurt you right now except for angering me. Your blood smells familiar.*

"How are you doing this?" Damien asked.

*Telepathy. This is how we all communicated once upon a time. You can understand me because I am sending electrical impulses to your brain with my own. Your brain interprets these impulses as it sees fit. It contours them into a manner of speaking that you can comprehend. It twists them into a tongue and dialectic that you would use these impulses to communicate with another of your kind. It matters naught what language you speak.* The voice whispered to him.

"What do you mean that this is the language you used to communicate with? God, how old are you?" Damien inquired while grasping the backside of his scalp.

*This is not a language. Language is spoken. I told you; this is telepathy. And my age, by two-legs years? One thousand, seven hundred and forty-eight.*

“Why do you keep calling me ‘two-legs’?” Damien demanded.

*You have only two legs. I care not for your name the same that a lion does not that of a gazelle. I communicate with you like I would a bear that unknowingly sauntered in here as I would a bird that landed on my fur. You were born inferior to me. Test that if you might. You would not be the first. I relish a challenge. Your kind has not posed a threat to me in centuries.*

“Look, I’m not challenging you about anything. I really should be going because I have to make sure that I check on that thing I was talking about,” Damien said quickly as he turned around and began to walk away.

*Not yet.* The voice snidely whispered. *You will stay.*

“I mean I guess that I could hang out here for a while or whatever, but I can’t be here too long or people will be looking for me.”

*I once knew a two-legs many centuries ago who taught me much about your kind. He was a kind two-legs. He cared very much about everyone close to him. I’m curious how the river of time has shaped your world. I have met and faced many mortals on the battlefield. I felt their sorrow, fear and pain as I sunk my teeth through their childish armor. You smell like someone I once met. Rarely do I get an opportunity to speak with one as I do you.*

“Who was he? How long ago are we talking here?” Damien gulped.

*I was a carelessly curious pup. He was a warrior that hailed from a country that, from hearing your thoughts, no longer exists. This was eleven-hundred and thirty-two years ago.*

“Oh my god. Are you serious? That was the last person you’ve talked to?”

*The last two-legs? Yes. Person? No. Person is a strange term. He taught me the language of your world. He stumbled in here with two wounds in his chest. They were from arrows. He had his tail between his legs.*

“Tail? He had a tail? That definitely wasn’t a human.”

*It’s a colloquialism, you idiot. He didn’t have a tail.*

Damien scratched the back of his head. “Did he make it? Because two arrows to the chest sounds like a death sentence to me.”

*He survived. He actually misdirected other humans away from me after seeing that I was wounded from a skirmish with his allies. I could see in his eyes that he thought he was hallucinating when he saw me. See for yourself.* Rockë slowly lowered his head and placed it on to the ground in front of Damien. There was a scarred gash that extended two feet above his left eye that matched the size of Damien's body.

"Dear god. They did that to you?"

*Aye. They did. It was a true battle. When he came upon me I roared into his mind in the same manner that I speak to you now.*

"What the hell would you two, especially, have to talk about?" Damien scoffed.

*Bite your tongue, whelp!*

The voiced shouted as Rockë began to growl at him, showing off his bone-white fang; he had only one. His other was dulled and flattened. The rest of his teeth were jagged like broken bottles. Damien quickly shrunk in reaction like a reverse blowfish.

"I didn't mean to offend you. I was only implying that the two of you could not have had too terribly much in common."

*On the contrary, we spoke about the politics of your land. We spoke about your religions. I sought knowledge of the realm that was so hungry to chase me away. I did not understand. We taught each other much about our respective worlds. He told me about his life. His name was Strom. He is the only honorable two-legs I have ever encountered.*

"It just sounds like he was scared of you like I am."

*You will respect him or your body will be torn to shreds and the curtains that give backdrop to your frailty of mind will be ripped down.*

"I meant to say that he sounds like an admirable man," Damien quickly corrected. "Have you crossed paths with many humans while living out here?" Damien shrugged as he looked at the sea of trees that surrounded them at all angles.

*No. I have not always dwelled in such places. I came here to withdraw from the world.*



“Withdraw from the world? Why? You’re magnificent! You have so much to offer; your existence would spread like wildfire, and people would fight to simply glance at you! You can’t go back to sleep, Rockë!” Damien tilted his head.

*As I have alluded to, there is no longer a place for me in this realm. I was hunted endlessly by fields of two-legs for centuries past. I was not as large as I am now or else they would have had a war on their hands. I did not yet have the mastery to command those creatures weaker than myself. As for now, you are correct: I cannot return to my slumber. But, I will not become a source of entertainment for your kind. There is an end to all eras. There were several before mine and there will be several after man’s.*

“What do you mean? Are you going to stay here?” Damien inquired.

*What do they think of me, the leaders of mankind? I suppose they have decided to pick their battles more wisely?*

“I think you were asleep for too long. I don’t think that anybody knows that you exist. I only ended up here because I live in a small border-town and I walked hours into the woods. Nobody cares to come out here anymore.”

*They don’t know I exist? You never heard stories about me from your parents or even your grandparents? Nothing?*

“No. Nothing at all,” Damien lowered his head.

*I should have known by the way you were dressed. You aren’t even wearing armor. You know, not all two-legs are able to communicate with me in the way that you do. Most can only hear me speak.*

“Why didn’t you tell me that? Does that mean that I can talk to other humans like this?” Damien gasped.

*Not at all. I opened this channel. That took around four centuries to master. Tell me, Damien, why are you here? How have you found yourself in this place?*

“You said earlier that this was the second time that you’ve heard the word desperation?”

*Yes. Strom was the first to convey this idea to me and since then you are the first creature to use that word once more.*

“Desperation is a feeling of weight in your stomach, that ya know, prevents comfort. It makes your belly feel like it’s all jumbled up. It makes you worry. It hurts your heart.”



*So you seek this comfort elsewhere?*

"It's never made that much sense to me. It's always felt like something I should just run from. I assumed there would be answers for me somewhere like I just had to ask the right questions in the right places."

*This makes sense to me. I have never been desperate, so I am eager to hear your problems. Please. Speak to me plainly. Think of me as what you call a friend because I bear you no harm.*

"I am not fit to be a father. My girlfriend is pregnant. None of my friends talk to me anymore. My mother sleeps in a homeless shelter every night. She can't be trusted with a single dollar. I can't give her any money, and she won't speak to me. My father has a gambling issue, and of course, he needs money too. I can't afford to give him anything either." Tears began to stream down from Damien's eyes as he whimpered, "Why do I have to be the person to cater to everyone else's needs? I can't be there for them. Why do I have to be the adult? It's fucking impossible. I feel like I can't say no to anyone."

*Young one. Oh, young one. Listen to my voice and you listen well. You owe your makers nothing. They owe you nothing. Being delivered unto this world is not a debt. We are here by chance. Take this world by its most vulnerable points and wring it dry. If you see a weakness, then you'd better seize it. Neither of us asked to walk this land. Strom was a troubled two-legs. He worried that his family would starve without him. He wouldn't stop telling me that the charity of the town would not feed his family. He always said that he wouldn't-*

"Rockë! What do you mean? What is the point of all this? I don't understand! What does that guy have to do with me?"

*Strom arrived here with a hunger like that you do. I felt it within him. I sensed it. I sense that within you. It is not a quirk of personality; it is a necessity of the soul. I see now what desperation is. Return to your world, two-legs. Do not tarry here. This old sack of bones has little left to offer this world. I can still smell you. I still catch the scent of your personality more than my telepathy can. My strength is yet diminishing.*

"So what, Rockë? What do you want to hear me say? You're not making sense!"

*Two-legs, I need you to accept me into your heart. I want you to accept your need for myself in your life. I need you to be ready to inhale*

*my embrace. Do this and I will become a part of you for your remaining years. You will hear my echo through your mind for the years to come. I will give you a sense of confidence and attachment to this land that no human has ever felt. You will belong here as much as the trees and the wildlife. I will give you the courage to say 'no' to whomever you desire and the courage to look into the eyes of any adversary fearlessly.*

"Why would you want to do that for me?"

*I would do it for you the same as I would for Strom if we were given another chance. My years here are numbered. I was sent. I'm not to stay. Do you accept my offer or not?*

"I do. I humbly accept," Damien said sadly, caught up in the moment.

*Lean your head back and open your mind, as well as your mouth, eyes, and ears.*

Damien drew back his head in a state of helplessness. Rockë began to growl. His fur shifted from emerald green to dark blue, then to a radiant leaf-green. His coat glowed with a brilliant hue unmatched by anything that Damien had ever seen in his life. There was a visible aura around Rockë that shined and swirled in the air. The wind picked it up and carried the aura throughout the woods. It floated around Rockë and Damien protectively. The gigantic wolf funneled his existence into Damien's mind the same way they communicated.

Damien felt Rockë's essence slide into his nostrils and down his throat. He felt himself suddenly change the way he felt about everyone in his life. The people he worked with, his family, and his neighbors. He instantaneously felt a shift in his agenda. Damien looked down at his trembling hands to make sure this was really happening.

*Swear now. Swear to keep my existence a secret.*

"I swear that I will never divulge your existence to another two-legs for as long as I shall live, Rockë," Damien said.

*Go on. Turn around and leave. The bargain has been made. I have done all that I can for you, as well have heard all that I need to, inside of you and out. I think that I finally understand you and your kind now, or at least as much as I will be able to. I understand what desperation means and what it now means for me.*

"That's it? What the fuck? Tell me more about Strom and the days of before," Damien said with a raised voice towards a beast a dozen times his size.

*No need. I feel them in you now. You will feel it too if you're calm. You felt the bubbling in your veins earlier. That's what drew you here, the repressed emotions that boiled deep underneath your surface. Are you sure that you did not feel it before? You say you walked here by accident. Such is not true.*

"Why would you tell me all that you have so far, and then leave me alone to figure it all out?"

*I have not left you to your own devices. Have you not been listening? I have decided to let you carry me with you always. My time in this realm is over, but before I leave, I'll pay back my debt. If not to Strom, then to his bloodline.*

"Pay back your debt? You don't owe me anything, Rockë!"

*Yes, I know that, but I do to your predecessor. You were not able to find me by accident.*

"What are you talking about?! Stop! Let's talk this through."

*I have given you all that I can. I've imbued you with a slice of myself. It will not work against your decisions, but it will give you a sense of perspective that you did not have before. You might or might not notice an alteration in your tone of voice. Go! Now! Return home. I will begin to count down from ten. Once I hit zero, you will have no idea who I am. You will be unable to see me. Ten. Nine. Eight.*

"Please stop counting! I have so many questions! Where were you sent from?"

*Seven. Six. Five. Four.*

"ROCKË! PLEASE STOP! ARE THERE OTHERS LIKE YOU!?"

*Three. Two.*

"Jesus, Rockë, why?" Damien felt himself start to come to tears.

*One.*

Damien saw an overbearing flash of whites come over everything that he'd ever seen with his own eyes and ignite. His ears were deafened by a relentless ringing, a frequency that made Damien clench his jaw tightly and his eyes squint.

After a couple moments, he gathered his surroundings and reoriented himself.

“It is ridiculously cold out here,” he murmured as he wiped away placeless tears from his eyes.

Damien looked around. *‘Let’s get out of this place. It’s been long enough. We have a lot to do tomorrow.’* he thought to himself. He grunted as he began to trudge home. “Damn, what is it, 4 a.m.!” Damien shouted as he turned around and began to briskly walk back through the dense forest.

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# PHOTOGRAPHY

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# LILLIAN SPENCER AWARD-WINNER

STORM PENDING  
DIANE FULMER



PROGRAMMER  
RIDZ PATRICK





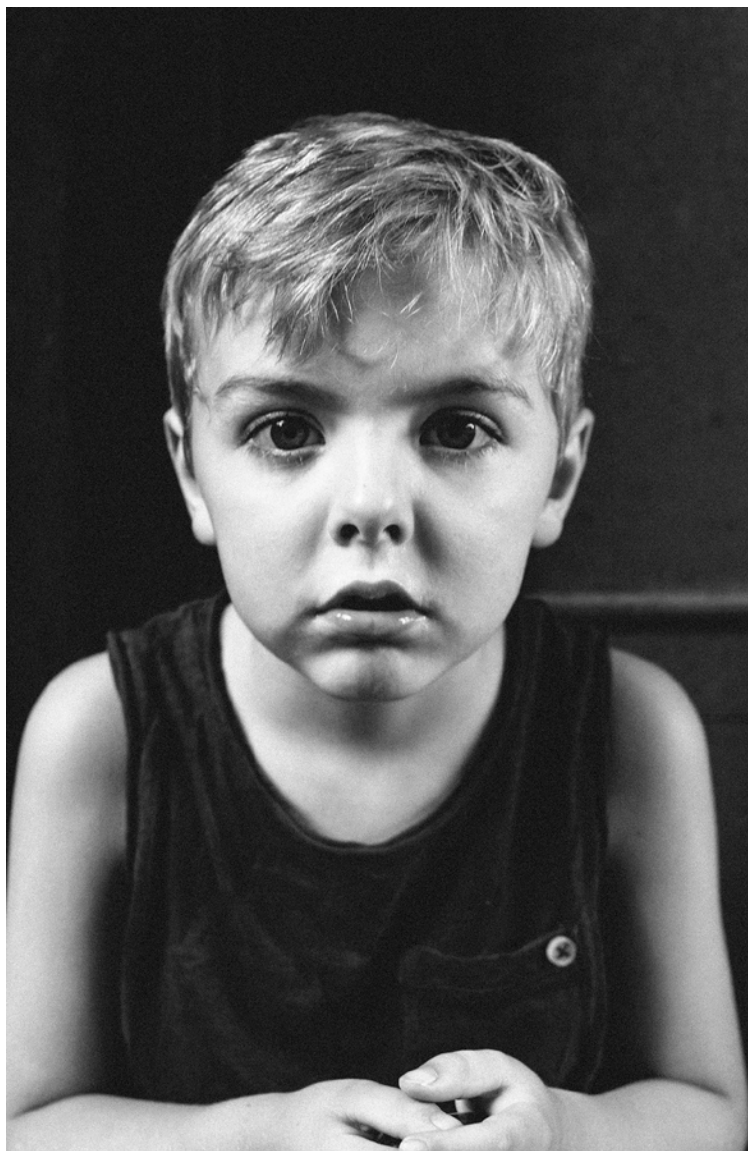
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KARTER DREHER





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# GOODBYE, CALLIOPE.

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*Calliope* was established in 1984 to provide students from all disciplines an outlet of expression and a way to showcase their creative works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, art, and photography to their faculty and peers. Thirty-five years' worth of students and faculty have dedicated themselves to each volume of *Calliope* so that she might represent with dignity the diversity and creativity of Armstrong's student body.

Today, we say goodbye to *Calliope*, but we will always remember her gifts. *Calliope* gave experience, patience, and skill to all student and faculty editors, advisors, and staff. *Calliope* gave an escape, an outlet, and a home for our deepest thoughts and feelings. *Calliope* gave us inspiration to keep writing, drawing, painting, and photographing. Mostly, *Calliope* gave us courage to share parts of ourselves that, without her, we may never have.

We encourage all veteran staff, artists, and advisors to share their memories of *Calliope* using #REMEMBERCALLIOPE, that her inspiration may continue.

In the future, students will have the opportunity to submit their creative works to Georgia Southern's *Miscellany*, which will be extended across all three campuses of our new university.

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*“As we enjoy these glimmers of magic, these echoes of old dreams and hopes new and daring, may we each appreciate a little bit more that magic which surrounds us daily.”*

*-Rita B. Enzmann, Editor, Calliope Volume I, 1984*

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