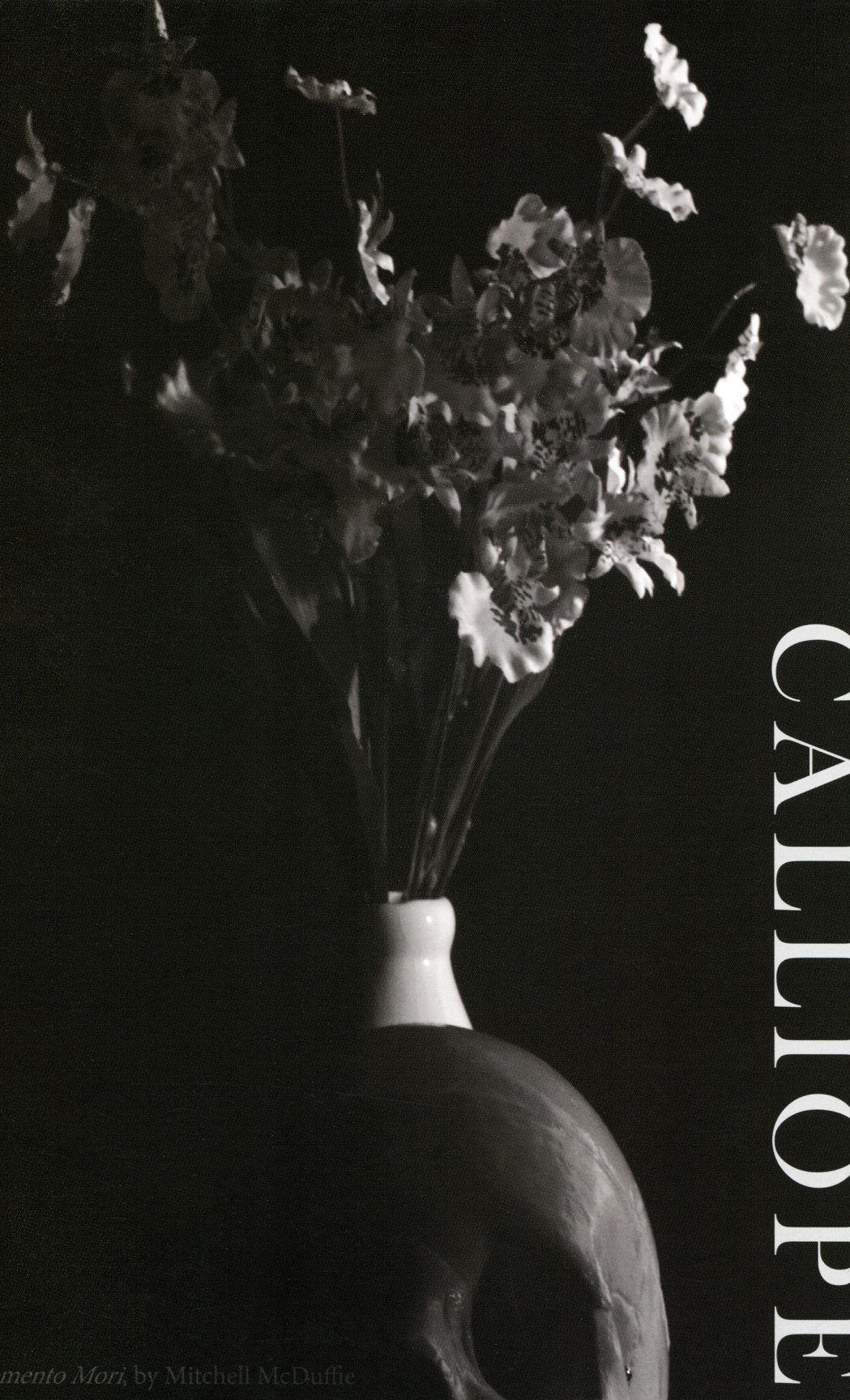


# CALLIOPE

*Memento Mori*, by Mitchell McDuffie





# CALLIOPE

## VOLUME XXXIV



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# My Own Ghosts in Savannah

Joshua Winslow

A thousand midday suns threaded delicate beams of light through the thick canopy of oak above. The leaves themselves seemed to sigh together, perhaps to emulate the coming and going of a gentle tide. Heavy, ancient branches were groaning and knocking as their leaves caught the gentle breeze, unfelt but no less present to those walking below. For all the noise made by the live oaks that populated Lafayette Square, the characteristic sound here was that of the fountain in its center. A steady and gentle rush of water falling from two bowls into a round pool surrounded by a low brick wall, the fountain seemed as timeless and as unrushed as the Spanish Moss swaying from the branches above.

My mind was elsewhere, far from the beauty of the square and farther still from the peace the space evokes to so many visitors and locals alike. I would depart Savannah for Afghanistan again that day, a goodbye I've grown numb to rather than accepting of. Yet, as I paced over the undulating brick sidewalks that passed the fountain, my mind flashed to another time, another night years before.

Suddenly, I stood at the north end of the fountain, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist to my back and in the still amber twilight of the square ahead. There she stood pacing and turning playfully around the fountain wall. Her features as veiled by darkness then as they are by time now. The streetlights behind her were silhouetting shoulders here, an outstretched arm there, every elegant motion defined as I approached. My arrival wouldn't interrupt her dance since she had been waiting for me after all.

But then the daylight reached my eyes again, eyes that saw what lay ahead and not behind. There was nothing atop the fountain wall but a few scattered leaves. My pace quickened to match my thoughts that were now facing a surge of memory and the weighty thought that this space held so many of them for me. This one square bore memories of new love, heartache, playfulness and friendship, beauty and repose, uncertainty, and anxiety. Yet, I had almost walked by without a nod to any of it.

I had fallen in love with Savannah in that square. I had fallen in love, in Savannah, in that square. Maybe the city is a little bit bewitched. All the tour companies would surely have you believe it. The number of weddings and local photographers who make their livings off them might share the sentiment. Was I a hopeless romantic before I made my home here or did the city seep into

me somehow?

In Madison Square, I met a former love, her as nervous as I as we agreed to start anew together. We hadn't sat on the bench more than five minutes before a photography student asked to take our photo, commenting on how lovely we looked together. I had barely regained my breath from running half a dozen blocks to meet her after waiting in the wrong square, despite the fact that I'd chosen where to meet.

In Orleans Square, the low stone benches held us both as we stretched our legs out and commented on the noise of the night around us. A lifetime later, I sat at an opposite bench and put pen to paper in memory of the same girl, both of us long since moved on from each other and her from the city we met. The memory a ghost in front of me, outstretched on the same bench in its own eternal twilight.

At the entrance to Colonial Park Cemetery, I sat next to a woman dressed for the 18th century. She was dressed so for a ghost tour she was soon to lead. Though I'd arrived, the group she was to host had canceled, so we sat at the head of so many graves, myself speaking to someone who, no doubt, resembled a wanderer from one of them. She would nearly be the death of me. But then, how could I have known?

I passed McDonough's, the neighborhood pub where I once spotted a stranger, obviously uncomfortable with her company, and struck up conversation. Her blue eyes softened, beaming, defiant of the low lit bar. She was on holiday from the UK with only a day in Savannah, her time nearly spent. With no regard to the late hour, we walked down Bull Street and up Barnard. I was waving my hands with aplomb while recalling the stories of Casimir Pulaski and James Oglethorpe and introducing the ghosts of Wright Square and the 1790 Hotel. We strolled until the sun rose. Once it had, we took my motorcycle across the bridge to catch a view of the city from Hutchinson Island.

A red dress and long, dark hair amid the lasers and artificial smoke made me certain she moved in slow motion. We were caught in a downpour with only a canopy of leaves to shield us. A kiss in the rain. Sunrises at Tybee Island. Bioluminescent plankton aglow to match the stars. We shared countless late night walks, the city ours, and a laugh as some stranger stumbled through a scene so clearly meant for two. In my memory, glasses clink together, smiles widen, and laughter echoes, though I can't say whose it is. The sun shines through my bedroom window and catches the gold in her hair. Leaves shuffle in the autumn wind and summer heat melts away as the motorcycle throttle

edges higher. For all the noise of the motor and wind, I can hear my thoughts as clear as ever.

If this is what every young man is faced with as he says farewell to his salad days, then why did nobody warn me?

Geographically and socially, Savannah is just the right size for these memories to slosh among one another in a suffocating fashion. As sweet as the memories are, the bitterness of time passed, opportunity missed nearly corrupts the place for me. Could I ever share a bench or a midnight stroll with someone new without being reminded of those who came before? The magic of the city added to the magic of these past encounters, and in so doing may have diluted them both. I think on the past and can't help but fear that no new romance could top the stories whose epilogue I now ponder.

Today, the song Savannah sings is more glum than sweet. Still, it remains a masterpiece of sirens and song, and I long for the place just the same. Under those same branches and beneath the same sighing leaves, someone sits smiling tonight, my own ghosts among them.



# Untitled

Lucy Stone

It's not my fault or my responsibility to give you back those years you missed.

12 through 18.

I raised myself. I developed my own identity and opinion about the world around me. Sure, take all the credit, but give me most of it. Freud, or some other psychologist, claims that 0 to 2 are our most formative years. Yeah, you were there. But here's the thing: I don't remember. Just like you don't remember those 7 years that I was becoming an adult. Now I am one, at 22, looking to move and go to grad school. You say I'm not ready, foreseeing my future will be doomed. But guess what, it is as bright as the summer sun reflecting off the hot sand at Tybee, filling my skin with vitamin D and clearing my mind of all my memories of you.

Who are you? You blame me. I am the selfish one. I am immature, ungrateful, and immoral. Take your god, your "good." I'm through with your preaching of the sins that I'm committing.

I love everyone, including you and your abuse, the destruction you've caused me mentally.

Looking back, I could have gone to Harvard or Yale. My brain was eager like a sponge, but my cocoon, my suffering body, mind, and spirit, beaten down, crushed into nothing. I saw myself as nothing. No future. I did not deserve one. After all, you were "always right," especially during those 7 years.

I'm 14, "my only reason for living," you tell me, slurring, crying on the phone. At 15, I'm just like my father, a selfish bitch, corrupt in the mind. At 16, I can finally detach myself from you, yet not ignore the 15 missed calls asking me why I don't love you. At 17, you're dying. I can't save you. It's all my fault, I tell myself. The guilt, the agony. I don't deserve a life when I can't even save yours. At 18, you're rescued, but not by me. I was never good enough.

Who are you? Tell me again. Preach to me from your all-knowing bible, written by you. Leave me one more paper on my pillow when I arrive home after you're fast asleep. Written by you, it tells me about the evils I'm committing. If only I could let my "higher power" in, then I'd be cured, right?

Who are you to tell me right from wrong? What's your insight? You can't even remember the past 12 years of your life.

# The Last Pharaoh

Michelle Ramos

The sun is rising now.  
While my handmaidens collect our weapons,  
I put on my war paint. Green on the eyes,  
black lines to sharpen them. The white linen gown,  
the beaded wig and collar, these are my armor.  
Today will be the final stand against Rome  
and I hope my citizens will understand  
why I gave up my rites to be immortalized on the throne.

My ladies return with a basket and fear  
haunts their eyes. I offer one last time to  
let them leave, but they take my hands,  
lead me to the couch and we lift the  
hissing green beast from its wicker cage.  
Octavian may build cities with our ancient stones,  
feed his armies with our grain,  
but I am the Red Sand and the Black Land  
and he will never have me.

I do not scream.  
Instead I look outside.  
It is fitting to carry it out today,  
with the sun shining so brightly  
through the colonnade,  
and the sweet smell of an Alexandrian breeze  
rushing over the lotus from the sea.

As the jackal god beckons me I promise my people:  
the waters of the Tiber will never grow reeds.

# Cat Bird

Emily Scott-Graham



3/5 "Cat Bird"

Emily Scott-Graham



# Mind Over Matter

Eric Shepherd

Tom ran his finger down the side of the glass sitting in front of him, playing with the beads of perspiration running down the sides and forming small rings of water circles on the counter top. The stool that he had been sitting on for over an hour was now beginning to express its discontent of having Tom perched upon it for so long by creaking and groaning over the slightest of movements.

The clicking and clacking from the pool table in the far corner started to grate incessantly on Tom's ears, causing him to clench his teeth each time one of the balls was sent scurrying into the side pockets of the table. Tom arched to straighten himself on the stool hoping to alleviate the stiffness invading his lower back, and as he did so, felt a slight churn begin to foment in the pit of his gut. He tried to calm himself by taking a deep breath, but the air was fetid with perfume, bargain-bin cologne, and cigarette smoke, which formed halos of wispy clouds above Tom's head, causing his lungs to burn.

Tom leaned over on the counter to steady himself and clasped his head in his hands. A throbbing had begun a short time ago and now was matching the pulse of the music pouring from the speakers perched above the bar, hammering at his skull with each beat. His eyes became blurred, and large beads of sweat poured down his face, matching those on his glass. Tom loosened his tie and took off his blazer, draping the saturated garment across his lap. Rings of sweat saturated his neck and armpits. Tom undid the top button of his shirt and ran his hand through his hair, which had now become a matted mess of stringy ringlets plastered to his forehead.

The churning in the pit of his gut became more robust, making his entire insides do flip-flops, and Tom felt the first wave of nausea begin to march up his throat. Determined not to lose the battle his body was currently in engaged in, Tom seized his drink in defiance and brought the rim of the glass to his lips, but as he did so, his lips refused to part, his throat constricted, and his tongue seemed to swell like a puffer fish, causing him to admit defeat and slowly lower the glass.

As Tom sat at the bar with sweat pouring and hunched over, a patron sauntered up and sat down on the stool next to him.

"Say, buddy, are you okay?" asked the patron as he peered at Tom. "What's got you so down and how many drinks have you had? Maybe you

should think about slowing down.”

Tom looked at the patron but didn't answer. The words coming from the patron sounded garbled to Tom, and he just stared absently at the fellow, trying to ignore the nausea marching further up his throat.

“Buddy, do need help? Do you want me to call somebody for you?”

Tom continued to stare blankly at the man beside him. The patron motioned for the bartender, and when he made his way to the fellow the patron asked nodding his head towards Tom, “How many drinks has this guy had? I think you might want to cut him off.”

“Cut him off!?” the bartender exclaimed pointing at Tom's glass, “He's still on his first drink, man!” Tom had now shifted his absent gaze from the fellow back to his drink and felt the room start to spin. The patron looked at Tom with disbelief, shook his head, and said, “Buddy, if you're not drunk, what the hell is wrong with you? Are sick...do you got the flu...what is it?” Tom caught the gist of what the man beside him was saying and mustered all his strength to slowly answer, “NO...I don't have the flu...it's just...it's just....” his voice trailing off.

“It's just what?” asked the patron half concerned and half annoyed.

Tom couldn't form any more speech, and becoming irritated by the rapid-fire style of questions issuing from the patron, very cautiously reached for one the pockets of his blazer. Inside was a small box, and once Tom grasped it, pulled it out and placed it on the bar for the patron to see. Tom motioned with his eyes for the fellow to open it, hoping that the contents would stymie the patron's curiosity. The patron did as Tom indicated, and upon opening the box was met with a shining engagement ring with a large, square-cut diamond set in the middle of a luminous, platinum band.

The patron, with complete shock on his face, cried out, “Damn, son! Is this why you're so miserable looking right now? She said, no didn't she? What's her name? Is she pretty?” With indignation storming in the blue of his eyes and nausea on its continued warpath, Tom slowly turned his head toward the patron, licked his parched lips, and speaking through slightly gritted teeth said, “her name is Aella, and I haven't asked her yet.”

“What.... you haven't asked her yet?!” bellowed the patron. “Then why are sitting here all forlorn and such like life has just crushed your heart? When are you gonna ask her?” Tom again tried to inhale a deep breath, but was met with the same punch in the lungs from the pungent atmosphere as before. Tom

picked the small package containing the ring off the counter, gingerly closed the lid, and nervously ran his thumb and forefinger over the edges of the box. Looking back over at the patron who had been swirling his bourbon in his glass in anticipation of his response, finally answered the man and said, "I'm picking her up in about an hour, taking her to our favorite spot later where I'll then ask her to marry me."

"Well, well, well, now.... aren't you the romantic one!" said the patron with a child-like expression on his face. Tom couldn't decipher if the man was mocking him or sincere in his sentiments but quickly determined that he didn't care either way.

"So.... before you ask your sweet Aella's hand in marriage, you stopped in here to try and build up your courage first, huh? Well, bud, how's that working for ya?" Tom gave the patron the best sneer that he could muster and turned his attention back toward his glass sitting neglected in a pool of condensation.

The patron, not taking offense to Tom's cheeky disposition, reached over and patted Tom on the shoulder and said, "Well, congratulations, buddy, I truly mean it." Tom glanced over at the man and tried to feign a smile, but nausea cut the attempt short. With a large grin the patron raised his glass of bourbon high into the air, motioning with his free hand for Tom to do the same. Tom reached for his glass with shaky hands, clasped it, and raised his glass slightly above his head. The patron then took his drink, clinked it against Tom's, and in a thunderous voice cried out, "SALUTE!" and then slammed back the bourbon in pure hedonistic fashion.

Tom, in abject resolution of implementing mind over matter, tilted his head back slightly and slammed the watered-down whisky down his gullet in the same abandonment as did the patron. However, the results were different. The addition of the whiskey onto the battlefield of Tom's esophagus was all the nausea needed to burst through and claim victory over Tom's resolve. Tom doubled over in a series of convulsing spasms and spewed his mid-day meal in copious amounts all over the floor of the bar. The wet splatter of Tom's purging reverberated throughout the bar, as did the sound of solid chunks of refuse bouncing off the bottom of the metal stools, making a pinging noise. Tom clutched at his stomach, pleading for God to make it all stop.

The patron, with his feet high into the air to avoid the backslash of Tom's vomiting fit, looked first at the astonished faces of the other customers frozen in place and then over at Tom and smiled. Tom had just completed



his last heave and was slumped over on the edge of the bar with his forehead resting on his arm and face pointed toward the ground, clutching the engagement box in his other hand. Repositioning himself so that he now rested with his knees on the seat of the stool, the patron leaned towards Tom's ear and said, "My.... what a warrior you are!" Tom tried to raise his head to mutter some type of response, but a dry-heave caught him midway, forcing his head back down onto his arm. Then the patron patted Tom on the back, and with a sarcastic grin said, "Damn, son, Allea is one lucky woman!"

# Crazy One

Charity Williams

I couldn't breathe  
Until I saw you.  
Now I breathe in

Your skin,  
Your smell,  
Your smile.

Am I crazy?

Paint me in your light.

Your majesty,  
Your highness,  
Your extravagance,

Am I crazy?

Give me your life,

Your heart,  
Your soul,  
Your touch.

Am I crazy?

Be Mine.

Your attention,  
Your hugs,  
Your kisses,

Am I crazy?

Melanie  
Mitchell McDuffie



# C'est La Vie

Lila Miller

you are allergic  
to something in your food  
you do not know what it is  
you keep eating  
you realize this is  
the same approach  
you take with your life  
and drool a little

# Phantom

Pamela Reynolds

Twice a day we check on the cows, little Ike and I, an oddity in the neighborhood of pickup trucks. Perfect to shabby, they pass us on the road all with a wave of a cigarette hand wondering who we belong to. The lady in the city sweater with the leashed dog walks from fence post to fence post of harvested fields in no particular hurry. I note the unseasonably warm temperature on my cheeks and read the sky's daily message. Ike, with his ears floating behind him, sniffs the breeze for canine clues and sets our pace.

Twice a day we look for the pigs hiding in the muddy pool and count the cows in the pasture. Not much changes each time, but it's always different. The black cows with their white masked faces turn their heads to play statue as we approach. Still and silent, every scene in "phantom of the cows" is new and mysterious. Their eyes follow us til' we pass, then resume their opera with long, drawn-out moos and bowed chewing heads. Sometimes we walk down to where the road takes a 90-degree turn and even further past the farm houses and mailboxes. Twice a day Ike and I take a break from the sadness of growing old.

I never feel at ease when the November wind blows warm on bare hardwoods and the sky is flat with clouds of autumn struggling to take hold. It's easy to do nothing here where life seems to grow slower everyday. I feel my vis-it sinking gradually into the monotonous rhythms of rocking chairs and television reruns. Today I dawdle the day away noticing dingy glassware and dust on worn furniture. Ike, unaffected by the gloom and gray, coaxes me with playful stances and optimistic barks to take our usual walk. His eyes convince me that, if we hurry, we will make it back before the sun sets.

In the security of my sweater, I bend down to attach Ike's leash. I slugg-ishly unfold myself, concurring with the bland, sleeping grass and listless bugs. Even they have nothing to do. As my gaze widens beyond my feet, I begin to notice a few scattered olive-shaped shells. Surveying broader, I see more, and more, and more, not just a few, but lots of brown olive-shaped shells, pecan shells, ripe unshelled pecans, rings of them decorating the ground from the tree's trunk to the farthest reach of its branches. I snap from my daze. This beautiful and leafless pecan tree with its scattered nuts stands in full view of the front porch. Why hadn't I noticed it before? Instead, I always looked beyond to the overgrown clearing near the house, where as long as I can remember was filled with rows and rows of summer vegetables to pull from the earth for



dinner and to pickle and can in the fall. For years now, only what grows on its own survives and is left for the wandering raccoons and rabbits to harvest.

But today there are enough nuts here in the front yard for the squirrels, the chipmunks, and I. So I leave Ike busy enjoying the freedom of his leash dangling behind him and run into the house for a grocery bag. I collect the brown, unblemished nuts and leave the rough, black-husked ones for time to hatch. The bright red pickup passes on his way home, and a group of crows look for shelter. Occasionally, I look for Ike. He loves chasing smells on the verge of making some great discovery. Bending and bagging in a race against the dimming sky, I let my mind wander from thought to thought. The clouds thicken with an ominous message, and I stop for a moment to plead with nature to bring back order with a cool autumn wind – one that announces winter instead of the warmth of a false spring. It's all so confusing.

I don't think Pop knows who I am anymore. They say he will never call me by name again. I see him watching the evening sky from the front porch, when suddenly I remember the wood and glass gun case that sits by the door. Surely it's locked. The lined-up shotguns are just a grab away from where Pop can see the lady in the sweater stealing his pecans.

# Savior Self

Meshia Malone

Sister can you hear me  
Can I tell you  
That when I hold you,  
The woman cries out for the child  
You are not dead  
He hits you once, twice, three times,  
Until you're hypnotized,  
And buy into his lies,  
But you are not dead  
You thought his presence was a blessing  
Healing is difficult,  
But love is a weapon  
Love can leave you lying on the floor, bleeding,  
Needing his love, touch, and acceptance  
While he's on his knees begging for penance  
Your black eye casts no shadow  
His red eye sees no blame  
Make no mistake,  
He will try to explain  
You forced his hand  
You only thought of yourself  
But was it self-defense or defense of self  
Your wounds wave to you in the mirror  
Your ten small neck bruises become clearer  
They morph before your eyes,  
Forming a noose  
Soul haunting the skeleton of a recluse  
Exhale in hell  
It's time to fight or flee  
As we're on our way to forgiving the bully  
Edge of twenty-two,  
Helping the runaway youth find the truth  
They are not dead because of you  
They have a voice to rejoice,  
And understand they have a choice  
The reaper was scheming to creep,

Until they were ambushed by someone ready to fight  
Your soul conjures up pain for a deadbeat dad  
An alcoholic mother was all you had  
You're waiting for someone to save you,  
So you put your mind on a shelf,  
But what you didn't realize was that you had to savior self  
The Washington Whore has been abolished  
Your pain is acknowledged  
I am you  
You are I  
Eve girl and Eve woman  
Unite to fill the void of life  
Incite a riot,  
No more sacrifice  
No more crying,  
No more trying to fix shattered dreams  
He broke the unbreakable,  
Or so it seems

# Taking Liberties with Woe

Lila Miller



## Wo(e)man

*That man says women can't have  
as much rights as man,  
cause Christ wasn't a woman.  
Where did your Christ come from?  
From God and a woman.  
Man had nothing to do with him.*

SOJOURNER TRUTH  
1851

**B**EFORE LAUNCHING an important women in history the period of time o creation of the wo A.D. 100).

The history of men can be summo ful. Women's relat summed up with owned women, j camels, and child

longed to the father. He could do what he wanted with even kill them. But that's another story.) Women were or even lesser human beings; they were livestock. Their children, and take care of them. (Of the children, the fi and a backup male heir. The rest were a nuisance.)

This system held for quite some time. The first vote—a basic token of humanity and equality in a That was in 1893. Seeing no national upheaval, Au Finland was next (1906), followed by Norway (191 Austria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, women had United States (1920). Women in France didn't get Japan, not until 1945 (do we hear the rumbling there?). In the rest of "civilized" North America, vote until 1948(!), and Mexican women had to v women still can't vote.

Being given the vote was called suffrage. In re

# Encounters with Coffee

Hannah Bryan

I still remember the moment I first saw you. You were wearing a blue dress (it might've been green) that was sparkly and shimmery and had a thin white-ish scarf with fringe hanging from it. You were outside the diner on Broadway under an awning trying to shield yourself from the rain. You kept looking about as though you were waiting for someone. Your tight frosted curls were getting damp from the drizzly air, and the light from the windows of the diner reflected off the mist in your hair to form a nimbus around you. I felt as though I were peeping through a keyhole, seeing only you. I quickly made my way diagonally across the street since the rocks that had been weighing down my shoes had seemingly vanished. I nimbly dodged a taxi, which screeched to a brief halt, brakes squealing. Its tires were slinging out days-old slush, which the moment before was a drab bister but now seemed to be more the shade of toasted nut, like those little blended ice cream drinks with the amaretto liquor inside them that you have after holiday dinners with family. I asked if you'd like a cup of coffee while you waited, and you said yes. I ushered you inside, briskly shaking off my snow-sodden chaussure as I followed behind, and we sat in a booth across from each other by a window. I had a cup of coffee with cream, and you ordered hot tea with a slice of lemon meringue. After we ordered, you excused yourself to the restroom, and I dropped some cream into my coffee.

It's funny how much the appearance of things can change from one moment to another in a different time and place. I had a brief but foggy recollection of an image I had once during a final fleeting moment of one of my nebulous LSD-induced hazes when I dropped in the cream. At that time, the moment before the drop of cream struck the black liquid inside the cup, which, to my inveigled memory, was the size of a huge water tank. I was sitting on the edge of it, desperately clinging to the edge, trying not to fall in. As I hung on for dear life with my hands at my sides, the heels of my feet were clawing at the inside walls of the tank. I gazed at the inky black sea below me that was churning and swirling violently. I saw the first drop of cream strike forcefully, sending out shockwaves, and then, surrounding the epicenter, came a stupendous whirlpool, a beige-colored eddy of titanic proportions. It seemed to be a recurring thing with coffee. I always feel a bit nervous to have it front of me, never knowing what kind of encounter I'm going to have, but I want to feel normal, so I continue to order and drink it. I have to admit that I am also curious to see what dramatic visions appearing from the cup of coffee I will behold. One time I might look into the cup, and I'm thrust into the black of night. When the first drop of cream spurts in, it creates the wispy remnants of



a spiderweb that one would not have noticed if not for the faint shafts of light illuminating its ghostly existence. Other times it seems to take on the appearance of lightning on a stormy night or tendrils of smoke emitted after a blast of gunfire.

This encounter, however...this one is different. I tremulously pour the cream in, and the drops fall softly, deftly into the velvety café noir below. It swirls and swirls and swirls. I think of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the flowing river of chocolate, and the candy wonderland surrounding it. I'm there now, except there is no one else with me on the gondola that begins to float more swiftly on this river, not of chocolate, but of coffee. I have no oars; I have to trust in the current, which picks up speed, and I don't know where it might take me. Toffee-colored liquid laps playfully at the bow of my gondola, which is being continuously urged forward. I see a tunnel ahead of me and brace my hands on either side of the long slender boat, which has gotten faster, my heart-beat speeding up with it. I am now in complete darkness, save for some glowing flashes of different colored lights blazing around me, almost like fireworks, except gentler and without the booming explosion. In fact, there is no sound at all. I see a faint light at the end of the tunnel, and when I emerge from the other side, I see you walking back from the other side of the diner to rejoin me at the booth, a welcome end to my little reverie.

You glided into the booth, draping one leg carelessly over the other. A spaghetti strap slipped down your right shoulder, and I felt a hint of envy of the three curled forefingers of your left hand that faintly grazed your outer breast as you adjusted it back into place. You nonchalantly combed a few strands of flaxen hair behind your ear, but I saw the way your bright eyes perked up when you saw that your pie was waiting for you. You took very small bites and didn't finish the entire slice, but I noticed how you kept pressing the back of your fork deliberately into the crumbs; you were careful to get as many on there as you could but would ignore the bigger slice. You slid the fork daintily between your slightly full, bright pink lips, which you pursed sweetly together in the form of a heart and nodded with wide eyes as you listened to me during the few moments I was inclined to talk. You had just seen your first play on Broadway. Someone was supposed to meet you but had a last-minute meeting that went long, so he called ahead to have your ticket waiting at the box office and told you he would meet you at the nearest diner across from the theatre when the show was over. You told me how the lights slowly dimmed over the audience, making you feel like a child being covered with a blanket the night before an exciting trip. You described how the robust murmuring of the audience, the eruption of applause, and the swift silence that followed reminded you of an ocean wave, swelling up, thunderously crashing to shore, and then the solemnly receding

back as though it were taking its bow. Your eyes and lips fluttered so animatedly. I felt like I was beholding a butterfly when you described the tingles you felt the moment the orchestra played its first notes as the curtain opened, revealing a brightly lit stage and beautiful, ornate furniture. It was during the moment of the leading lady's solo speech, as she stood alone at the center, looking above and past the audience, searching for something, stretching her hand out over the sea of faces as if that something were just out of her reach, with the crowd collectively surging forward as though they might will her to get what she longed for, that you decided you would become an actress. I was the first person you told.

I may not have been in that audience, but I can't imagine them being more captivated than I was at that moment. We spoke for maybe 50 minutes, not quite an hour, before you were whisked away by the interloper who had left you waiting outside the theatre on that chilly wet night. I never saw you again.

I went on to get married and had a son who is now nearly the age I was on that far away magical and penetrating night that we met. My dear wife passed on a few years ago, a fine woman and a good one to me. There are a few things from that night that you didn't know. While I did tell you that I was in the military and had returned from a tour of duty in Vietnam, I never told you that I was one of the B-52 pilots who bombed villages in Cambodia, killing so many civilians: men, women, and children. You probably realized that I had just come out of the liquor store across the street from the diner because I had a bottle wrapped up inside a paper bag, but what you didn't know was that my intention was to go back to my room and after I drank down the bracing fiery contents of that bottle, I was going to take my loaded pistol and discharge a bullet into that area of my brain that is just too crowded. I needed to get rid of this tumor of bad memories. You see, the memories I had up until then were not so pleasant. I don't want to misguide you into thinking that I had memories of horrible things I'd seen in Vietnam. The truth is, I didn't really have to see much of that. I wasn't part of the clean-up crew afterwards. I didn't see it for myself, but I heard later that people were seen with skin so scorched that it slid right off their bodies, leaving the sight of bloody raw flesh. It made me think of the way cheese slides off a slice of pizza when it's been cooked for too long. No, most of what I "saw" of the country was based on maps, charts, and aerial views. I was part of mission Breakfast, one of the 48 bombers, which was diverted from South Vietnam across the Cambodian border to drop a collective 2,400 tons of bombs. During briefing at 0700 on the 18th of March, we were told that there was going to be a series of bombing missions — Lunch, Snack, Dinner, Supper, Dessert — that were all a part of Operation Menu, named for

the continued reference to meals in the codenames. The one that I was leading was designated Breakfast after the morning Pentagon planning session at which it was devised. We were the first to go, so our success was crucial. "Toss back some coffee, gentlemen, we need you ready," we were told by the briefing officer. I often wondered about the coffee that was taken by the gentlemen who planned these missions at the Oval Office and the Pentagon. Did they have really nice coffee to bolster them before making such decisions? Coffee that was freshly roasted and ground, served in nice china cups, with a variety of creams and sugars to stir in with dainty silver spoons? Or was it made from the cheap pre-bagged kind that you keep reheating and then stir in just enough powdered cream and sweetener to make it palatable before swallowing it quickly and then tossing the paper cup? I'm not sure if I ever really want to know what kind of coffee they had, but I'd like to think it was the latter. If the decision was all just a matter of doing what was needed to be done, a necessary coup de grâce, then I hope that they at least didn't enjoy their coffee while drinking it.

When the missions were completed, we were told that it had been a great success and was very productive. Kissinger came "beaming in with the report," at least that's what I heard. I lived with a lot of dissonance following that. On the one hand, I hated to smile with false humility and pride as I was clapped on the back while being told I'd "done a real good duty for my country," and on the other, I feared anyone knowing that I was part of the lead bombing mission which left children and their families scorched. I hated having to fear being labeled a "child killer," and I also hated to act with "grateful pride" when someone would shake my hand or clap me on the back. It was all mendacity because I didn't feel proud of anything except the way I could fly a B-52. It was for my mission that the B-52 long-range bomber was authorized for the first time. I was one of the first pilots to fly it, and what an incredible wonder of aviation it was! The huge plane with eight jet-powered engines and a wingspan of about 185 feet banked like a bird on a wire.

I tried really hard to come to terms over the years with what I had been involved in. I attempted to compartmentalize by learning new things. I read a lot of philosophy. Hegel made a particular impression. I figured if I could crowd my brain up enough then it would diminish and obscure the memories of these other encounters. Maybe it would help me forget altogether after enough time had passed, but I never forgot. It just got shifted and pushed around but never went away, like trying to sweep up a penny. It's nearly impossible. I even did what most people do when they're trying to avoid guilt. I transferred blame to other parties. I was "following orders by superior authority," and it wasn't actually me who dropped the bomb. It was the bombardier in my crew who dropped it. I merely flew the route. I tried some drugs, like angel

dust and LSD (my favorite) to soften the edge. Poor old Barry Greerson, my bombardier, really got lost in the spirit of the 70s and never quite found himself again. We used to tease him on base at Guam calling him “Stardust” because of his twinkly bright blue eyes that always seemed so alert and never missed anything. When I met him for a drink years later in a bar near Times Square, those very eyes were like looking into the vacuum of space, and I realized they probably reflected my own. I lost all sense of reason for what my existence was worth anymore.

I had been deeply reflecting on this that night when I came out of that dank store with all of the comforting familiar smells that most liquor stores have of damp old wood, tobacco, and the wafting air of various spirits. I saw you standing outside that diner, pulling your scarf around you, trying not to shiver. Instead of pushing west down 46th Street, I was pulled toward you. I watched you savor every bite of that lemon meringue pie and realized it was the first time I could watch someone eat a “dessert” without causing me to shudder. It was the first pleasant encounter with coffee I’d had in years.

You saved my life that night. For so many years, I’d wanted to thank you. I wanted to know if you ever got to stand on a dark stage with a pool of light illuminating you the way the windows of the diner created a halo about you on that misty dark night wrapped in shroud, when my heart stopped but kept beating. I think about the lady you described on the stage, her arm outstretched, searching for something. I’ve often reflected and had inner dialectics with myself, trying to understand what I was searching for so many years ago before I met you, before I participated in that war, and before I dropped bombs on villages that left children burned. What was I searching for when I enlisted? Adventure? A purpose? I may never know. The one thing I’ve come to realize and understand more fully is that maybe Hegel had it right. Maybe our purpose is to destroy ourselves so we can appreciate our humanity, our divinity even. The history of the world is not the theatre of happiness. It is a highway of despair. Mankind will continue to destroy itself, but then we build each other up as individuals and move on. I can be happy if I am in harmony with myself and enjoying the little moments and encounters that life has to offer me. Life is a stage for humans to experience horror in order to appreciate the true beauty. You showed me that.

I’ve put ads in newspapers over the years to no avail, and now I’m trying this thing called Craigslist hoping you’ll answer, hoping to find you, desperately longing to see how you’ve been, and to thank you. I also want to tell you that of all the things I remember about you and that night, my biggest regret has been that I failed to get your name.

# Scorn

Tara Van Kleeef

I'd asked you if you still loved me.  
The sun has been slicing through the kitchen curtains,  
Lacy and still, your face turned away from the  
Double breasted panes, icy, cold.  
Your presence chilled the air like a  
Nose numbing cologne.  
Tears stood stagnantly in my eyes,  
Refusing to fall,  
And they swam and drowned my vision of you,  
Warped and warm were you without them.  
They dripped from my cheekbones like  
Christmas tinsel.

I'd asked you if you loved me,  
And the silence answered me  
Far before you said no,  
Before the scorched coffee hissed from the kitchen side pot  
Twisting into the air in ripe, acrid waves. Bitter  
Eyes trained on the furthest doorway.  
Snow drifted, sifting soundlessly outside.  
The casual drip of the leaky faucet  
You'd never bothered to fix  
Eroding my skin like I was sandstone.



Vanilla Bane  
Ridz Patrick



# i was a Thing to adore

Lila Miller

we closed our eyes and kissed  
the sides of our linked hands  
a pinky promise to love  
you laughed because  
the pinky was  
the least important digit  
later I saw you had cut it off  
and made it into a necklace  
one less finger  
one more cross to bear  
I told you once  
I didn't like men  
who wore too much jewelry  
what more can I say?  
it all makes sense now  
i was a Thing to adore  
kept away from the neck  
and only at arm's length  
would you hold me again

# Liberty, Death, or Family

Ryan James

“Fire, fire, and be damned!!!” the people shouted, hurling sticks, stones, and snowballs at the soldiers, all the while calling them angry epithets and obscenities. The fiery crowd must have had over 300 people, with each person more enraged than the last as they took it out on the petite squad of only a dozen soldiers. In the midst of this chaos was 18-year-old William Foster, who had decided to take an evening stroll through Boston at the wrong time. He stopped, however, about 50 feet away from the Customs-House to observe the commotion, having been intrigued by the bustling of the agitated crowd. Being raised on a small farm in Virginia twenty miles from the nearest city, William never took much interest in colonial government affairs, as it hardly affected him. Yet here before him was a mob of angry people demanding blood, all because of some new tax law being passed. Just when the sun had finished setting, William saw eight soldiers split off under the command of an alarmed officer, as everyone continued chanting “Fire! Fire!” and “Be damned!” at them. William’s heart rate began to accelerate rapidly as the crowd started closing in on the squad of soldiers. And then suddenly, there was a gunshot.

Not two seconds went by until someone else yelled “Fire!” and all the soldiers began firing their muskets into the crowd, one after the other. The crowd quickly dispersed as people scattered off in every direction, yelling and screaming at the top of their lungs. Panicking, William darted down the street as fast as he could, as the gunshots blared on like a bunch of firecrackers. Taking a quick glance back, William spotted a frightened young girl in the herd of people, dashing down the street in his direction. After another deafening gunshot, she went down, falling face-first into the middle of the street. William stopped dead in his tracks, turned around, and began sprinting directly into the oncoming stampede of people to try and help the poor girl. Somehow able to avoid being trampled by the horde of people, he found the young girl unconscious and bent down to help her up. But as he knelt down, William could see a group of soldiers advancing up the street. So he scooped the girl up in his arms and took off again.

After running five blocks with the unconscious girl in his arms, he set her down in a quiet little alley between a tailor store and butcher shop, leaning her up against the side of the building. William knelt beside her and noticed the massive blood-stain on the bottom-left side of her dress, he then yanked out

his handkerchief and paused, hesitating to lift up her dress and find the wound. Taking a deep breath and swallow, he gently raised her dark-green dress until he could see the exit wound, about four inches above the knee on the inner portion of her leg. The ball had probably missed her bone by less than an inch. Trying to stop the profuse bleeding, he carefully wrapped his handkerchief under her thigh to cover the entry wound, and tied it tightly over the exit wound. As soon as he did this, she raised up with a loud scream, pushing a petrified William backward onto the ground. "Who in the bloody hell are you!" she screamed, trying to tell where she was.

"I... my name is William. I was just trying to help miss...You been shot in the leg." he stammered, the words barely able to escape his mouth as he sat up.

Still in shock, she looked down and saw the blood-soaked handkerchief wrapped around her leg. "Oh my God!" she cried out, as she began hyperventilating at the sight of her blood. William leaned forward to help, but was pushed back yet again by the girl. "Get back!" she yelled. "Don't touch me!" Her body was trembling and her eyes were filled with fright.

"Let me help you miss." William stated soothingly, trying to put her at ease. "You're gonna needs help gettin' to a doctor's office to treat that wound." The girl remained silent, but her breathing began to slow down as she stared fearfully into William's concerned, pine green eyes, wanting to believe him. As William glared back into hers, he finally took notice of how beautiful she truly was. Her hazel brown eyes provided the perfect contrast to her healthy, auburn hair tied in a bun, complimenting the tone of her impeccable, pale skin. She had full, red lips with curves more delightful than any hill-filled landscape in all of New England. And she was young, maybe a year or two younger than William.

"Thank you for helping me William." she said, sounding a little calmer now. "My name is Prudence."

"N--Nice to meet you Prudence." he said as he offered her a comforting smile. They then awkwardly shook hands, and after having relieved some of the tension, she agreed to let him help. "You're gonna be alright Miss." William assured her. "I'm gonna take good care of you." It was love at first sight.

Eight years and three months to the day that William met his beloved wife, Prudence, he sat on his back porch recollecting the events that had transpired on that fateful day, while admiring the miles of beautiful green landscape



the North Virginia hills and trees surrounding his home had to offer.

Accommodating William on this evening journey down memory lane was his favorite gouda-clay pipe for smoking hemp, which he only used during periods of deep self-reflection. His wavy, dark-walnut hair rested on his shoulders, trembling slightly in the light wind as he slowly paced back and forth in his rocking chair, marveling over the lovely pink and orange sunset. This was his time to wrangle in the wars waging inside of him, for he was about to make the biggest decision of his life, and was still unsure of what it would be.

"I've known you you're whole life, Billy." Chatwin said, "I knew your parents and watched them raise you since you were just a tiny lad, yet I've never seen you so troubled by a single ordeal." William was without words. He just sat silently on the bench, eyeing the many people and carriages passing by them on the street. People talking, laughing, and going about their usual daily business for a nice sunny day. "Just one year ago," Chatwin continued, "you were right there on the front lines, rootin' and shootin' for freedom with the rest of them boys, right where you were supposed to be. Now since you've gone back to farming, you lose your wits at the mere thought of taking up arms again."

"I've a baby now." William mumbled, still refusing to make eye contact with Chatwin.

"Yes son, I know." Chatwin nodded. He placed his hand on William's back, and sat back on the bench fixing his gaze into the street. Chatwin was a tall man with short graying hair, and relatively few wrinkles for a man his age. "I've just never known you not to finish something you've started." he finally said after a long pause. "It's not who you are, and you know it."

"I know who I am, and who I am hasn't changed." William stated, sitting up. "And neither has that which I desire. But please understand that I cannot simply pursue it on the battlefield any longer. For if the worst should happen—" William stopped himself, shutting his eyes as if he were about to burst into tears. "While I fear not for my own safety," he continued, "I do for that of my darling wife and newborn son. I cannot bear the thought of my beloved Prudence to be widowed with a child by my doing, to be abandoned by her own husband, left in worse shape than the day I found her. And for our infant son, Thomas, born only four months ago, having to grow up never knowing his father, is sickening. It is the only thing that delays me Chatwin. For I have not deserted our cause, but I have refused to desert my family."

And now it was Chatwin who was lost for words. Finally understanding



William's hesitation to return to the conflict, he smiled sympathetically, proud of the man that William had become. Chatwin cleared his throat and remarked "You have so much of your father in you William, God bless him. It's a damn shame he's can't be here to see the bright young man you are today. You've carried your weight for the cause of liberty, and then some. It'd be a sin to ask you of anything more. But knowing you well as I do, I mustn't refrain from informing you of the Resistance's plans." William looked up, with heightened curiosity. "Word circulating through the ranks is that General Washington is leaving Valley Forge in a fortnight to make a move on Clinton's troops in New Jersey. I leave here the morning after tomorrow to rendezvous with General Greene back at camp. If by any chance you do change your mind, you can ride with me. There's always room for you with us Billy."

"There's always room for you with us Billy." Chatwin's remarks echoed in William's mind, as he contemplated their conversation from the previous day. Still unsure, he continued to puff smoke from his pipe, enjoying the sunset. While William was hesitant to leave Prudence to assist the militia for a second time, he knew his chances of death were lower than before. France had made an alliance to fight alongside the colonies, which would increase his chances of returning to raise Thomas. Not to mention the advantage to be had from the troops' time training at Valley Forge for the last six months. They would be better equipped than ever, and with the help of the French, America would win her independence in no time.

"It's about preserving our liberty from oppressive tyrants like King George." William shouted, while addressing his battalion of soldiers over the sound of cannons firing. "He considers himself a mighty dictator, and we merely his puny, pathetic subjects!" Then, motioning to the 2,000 English troops at the end of the field, he continued "And when we offer peaceful and reasonable bids for our own sake's, he sends his army of fascists to enforce this hellish injustice upon us with an iron fist. And what would he have them do? Kick down our doors, plunder the product of our hard labor, and reign hell on our homes and families. They even slaughter our people without mercy!" The soldiers listened intently, letting William's words sink in. "Now brothers, I want peace as much as any of you. But sometimes peace has to be bought through struggle and bloodshed. Governments should exist to protect the rights of their people, not to become the greatest threat towards them. While I do believe that freedom is a gift, it is a gift from our Creator, not those who rule over us. Our rights come from God! Not government. And thereby, they have not the authority to take it! And I will not let them. WE will not let them! Not as long as we draw breath!"

The soldiers let out a deafening war cry, raising their hands and rifles in the air as if they had already won the war. As the chill-bumps arose on his arms and neck, William smiled, feeling invincible. It was the greatest moment of William's life. He then turned around to face the army before him, his men still cheering behind him. Looking down, he caressed the lock of Prudence's hair attached to his belt, and remembered what he was doing this for. Raising his head and gripping his rifle firmly, he courageously eyed the enemy, like a bald eagle would a fresh fish washed upon the shore. He then let out a devious grin, for he would take great pleasure in their misery.

It seemed like only yesterday. Steadily rocking back and forth in his chair, William watched the sun disappear over the tree-line. After a few more minutes, he placed the pipe on his lap, and came to a decision. He rose up from his chair and grabbed the lantern sitting on the porch railing, lighting it with a match from his shirt pocket. Walking back inside, he made his way upstairs to the dimly lit bedroom and found Prudence sitting at the dresser in her nightgown, brushing her hair in the mirror. He put the lantern on the dresser and gently placed his hands on his wife's shoulders, giving her a mild kiss on the top of her head. "I've made my decision."

Prudence immediately set the brush down and turned around with peaked interest. "Are you leaving?" she asked, her voice slightly trembling.

"No." William replied softly. "I'm going to stay here with you and Thomas. Someone has to look after the farm, and you can't do that while caring for a child."

Prudence looked relieved, but still expressed concern. "Are you sure this is really what you want William? You know our negroes could work the farm in your absence. It would be no trouble for me at all. Is it something else you're afraid of?"

William walked to the side of the bed and sat down. "Leaving you to fight was one thing, but to leave you with a child... it's different." William rested his face in his hands as Prudence sat by his side and placed her arm around him.

"It's no different William. You just have more to lose now." William sat up and stared directly at the wall in front of him, his expression still as a statue. "I have no doubt how much you crave your right to a peaceful life of freedom, but I also know that deep down, you fought for a different reason."

William's eyes grew wide as he began looking anxious. "Before I met you, there wasn't a fighting bone in your body. But after you rescued me, cared for me, courted me, and loved me... a fire ignited inside of you. You were angry." A tear slid down William's face. "You fought to avenge what they did to me that night on Kings Street. Is that not right William?"

"Yes," he replied, letting it out.

Prudence pried on. "But now Thomas gives you a reason not to fight. Where before you cared not whether you lived to see the next day, now you yearn to see your son Thomas grow into a man. The act of inciting payback was worth the risk of losing me, but not worth the risk of losing your son as well. Is this not true?"

"It is." William admitted shamefully. "But it doesn't mean I don't love you. Everything I did was out of love."

"I have no doubt of that, my dear. But if you stay or if you go, just be honest with your reasons. Be honest with yourself. I know how much you want to fight, for both the liberty of your family and out of vengeance for me. But please know that vengeance alone is not good enough a reason to risk everything you hold dear. I want you to stay William. For Lord's sake, I begged and pleaded on my knees for you not to leave before." Prudence said, beginning to cry. "And I don't want to live like that again. Grieving in agony, sobbing myself to sleep every single night of your absence, worried every waking moment that I might soon have only a bloody scar and lock of hair to remember you by!"

Prudence yelled. "But I also know that you must follow your own intuition." she said, lowering her voice again. "If you want to fight, I'll understand, but do it for the right reasons."

"I want to stay." William declared assuredly.

"Then stay." Prudence said, smiling through her tears.

William took his wife in his arms and held her tightly for several minutes. The tears continued to run down his face. For the first time in years, William finally felt free, having confronted and diminished the demons inside him. He would no longer fight out of vengeance for his wife, as there was nothing left to be gained of it. After giving his happy wife a long, tender kiss on the lips, he got up and took his lantern down the hall to the room where Thomas slept. He took a seat in a brown leather chair in the corner and placed the lantern beside him.

# Free Drowning

Bodhi Crouse

Let my cold body  
Submerge into the  
Warmth of the water  
Aching limbs sinking  
Empty thoughts filling

Let me hold onto  
What little I have  
The air in my lungs  
Memories that fade  
Ideas that shake me

Let my tears fall and  
Become lost in my  
New home, making it  
Saltier with each drop  
Skin wrinkling with them

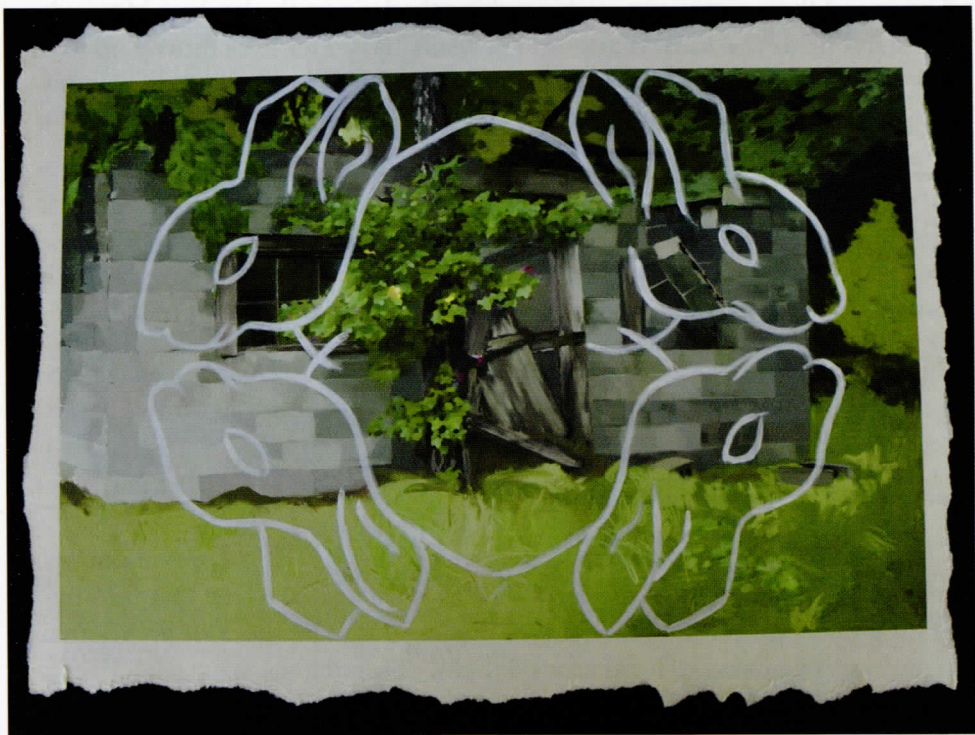
Let my head dunk be-  
Neath the still surface  
Lungs fill with water  
Tears no longer stream  
Limbs will move slowly

Let me stay like this  
Under the surface  
Immersed in warmth and  
Gently swaying from  
Side-to-side, back-and-  
Forth, to-and-fro. Stop.

Let me sink. Let me  
Swim. Let me be free.

# Rabbit House

Emily Scott-Graham



# The Contract

Charity Williams

*Zzzz.*

(666) 666-6666: Hey Monica Jackson! We have drawn your name for a lifetime contract! Join us by pressing 1 for yes.

The room was in chaos. The warden was nowhere to be found. Paper airplanes flew across the bricked sky as spit plastered itself against the walls of the cell. The inmates paraded around the room like maniacs with their animated grins and their suspicious smiles making the hair on the back of Monica's neck stand up as she looked around her math class. Her eyes moved up to the clock on the wall, and she heaved a sigh of relief. Ten more minutes. Math was Monica's last class of the day, and she was counting down the minutes until it was time for her to go home.

*Zzzz.*

Monica looked down into her lap at her vibrating cellphone as another message flashed across the screen. She picked up the phone and read the message noting the weird number that was attached to it.

(666) 666-6666: Join us. Press 1 for yes.

Monica furrowed her eyebrows in confusion. Who was this? Did they have the wrong number? Monica prepared herself to reply.

Suddenly, someone gasped interrupting her just as she was about to inquire about the sender of the messages. Monica turned to see that Johnny and his girlfriend Blondie Mandy were making out in the back of the room as a crowd was beginning to form around them, observing the spectacle. Monica frowned in jealousy at them but kept watching in a manner of longing.

As Monica watched them, she suddenly became aware of how lonely she felt. She hadn't had a boyfriend in over a year. Her last boyfriend was Snotty Ronny, and their relationship hadn't lasted more than three months. Monica really didn't want to be with him or anyone else, but it suddenly dawned on her that she would be completing her senior year of high school as a single woman. Whatever was she going to do with being single?

She continued watching Johnny and his girlfriend. The couple's lips were entwined with each other in a way that made Monica think of the entangled hands of lovers. In the midst of their passion, Mandy turned her attention



to Monica and smirked. Monica blushed and turned her attention back to her cellphone which had begun to vibrate again in her hand.

*Zzzz.*

(666) 666-6666: Join us.

Did they have the wrong number? It didn't seem like it. Determined to find out who was texting her, Monica texted back in an urgent manner. Her fingers moved at a rapid speed.

MONICA: Who are you?

*Zzzz.*

(666) 666-6666: Press 1 for yes.

"Hey, what did you make on the test?" a voice asked behind Monica. She turned to see that Annoying Andy was smiling at her. Monica shrank back at his grotesque smile. Every day Andy would find something to ask Monica, and every day she got more creeped out at the fact that he paid her so much attention. Why couldn't he just ignore her like all the others did?

Monica hesitated at first, but then her eyes darted over to her test where a big fat F glared back at her. Math had always been her weakest subject. She tried her hardest to pass, but she always came out of it with a D. She knew that if she couldn't pass this class with at least a C, she wouldn't be able to graduate. Monica sighed. This class was going to be the death of her.

Suddenly, Monica felt a warm presence near her, and she turned her head to see that Andy was leaning over her shoulder, peeking at the grade on her test. She felt his warm breath on her neck, and she shuddered. "What did you make on yours?" she asked him.

"B plus," Andy said. Monica turned some more to see that he was smiling at her again. "You'll do better on the next one. Maybe I can even help you study."

Monica pursed her lips together but nodded her head anyways. "Maybe." Andy smiled again, and Monica looked away shyly.

*Zzzz.*

She looked down to see another message popping up on the screen.

(666) 666-6666: You know you want to.

The mood had shifted. Monica felt the urgency of the message, and she knew that whoever this was didn't have the wrong number.

MONICA: Who are you? How many of you are there?

*Zzzz.*

(666) 666-6666: We are many. Press 1 for yes.

Monica looked back at Andy who was staring at her. A wide smile was still spread across his face, and Monica was enchanted. His eyes bore into her soul, and, for a second, she thought she saw fire and brimstone. The world had collapsed at her feet. The meek had inherited the earth, and Monica saw herself sitting at the throne. It was everything she'd ever wanted.

"Are you okay?" asked Andy waking her out of her daze.

Monica blinked. The fire was gone. Her throne had disappeared. It was just Andy and his stupid smile. Why was she single? Why couldn't she pass math? Was she even going to graduate? Did it even matter? "Yeah, I'm okay." Monica looked back down at her cellphone.

MONICA: 1.

She waited. She didn't know what she had done, but she did it. Now all she could do was wait and see.

*Zzzz.*

She hurried and picked up her cellphone. She desperately wanted to know her fate.

(666) 666-6666: Congratulations on joining the contract.

Monica heaved a sigh of relief as she realized that nothing bad was going to happen. Someone was just trying to scare her. It was just a stupid prank. It wasn't like she had signed away her life. Or had she?

There was laughter in her ear. It was a deep laughter. A guttural laughter that almost didn't sound human. Monica froze. She didn't want to look back, but she turned around slowly to see that the laughter was coming from Andy. He had his head thrown back as he belted out a laugh as monstrous as how he looked. The laughter stopped, and Andy was suddenly staring at Monica. His eyes glistened with hell.

"Did you guess my name?" he asked.

# Empty Haikus

Bodhi Crouse

Meet skull and wall and  
Beat out the troubled thoughts -  
Only for a time.

Press 'til rubies spill  
From nail and palm - then feel free.  
The feeling is gone.

Troubled thoughts, fleeing  
Feelings. That's all that is left  
Of this empty shell.

Numb the fleeing pain.  
Hide the thoughts that cause concern.  
Empty. Hollow. Me.

# Memento Mori

Mitchell McDuffie



# Ode to a Friend

Lila Miller

half awake living in a dream world  
like waking life without the whimsy  
i can see the disconnect  
the cat's harangue  
sitting tense on her living room couch  
the spoon on top of the mirror  
cannot be bent for powers of tele-kinesthetic  
but not for want of trying  
i tried  
i tried  
i tried  
and i remember what she said to me  
about intentions and how they never mattered  
you just had to leave people to their own devices  
and see what happened next  
even if it made every bone in your body  
shift like tides before a hurricane  
building, and then destroys part of the street  
we used to walk down together  
and i held her while she cried  
but not anymore  
that was a long time ago

# Spencer's True Calling

Danielle Kennedy

Hello boys and girls, I'm sure you have all read *The Spider and the Fly*. But there is so much more to this tale than that shabby little rant. My name is Spencer Squilliam III. Now, now, before you turn tail to run, hear me out. Let me get a good look at you. Ahh yes, you look like an educated bunch. I myself am a Harvard Spider. Third generation of Fly Bookworm Creatures. It's a proud family tradition, which is where my story truly begins.

I was a fresh bug in my first year at Harvard. My webbing was still wet behind my spindle. I had such high hopes and expectations for the future. I was surrounded by all walks of life. We had every creature attending that you could think of: bookworms, centipedes, flies, moths, beetles, ladybugs... You get the picture. Harvard has always been an equal opportunity bugdom, after all. I, myself, was fascinated and intrigued by every creature that crawled on campus. I had always heard my father and grandfather weaving such crazy tales about their sororities. Up until college, I had led such a sheltered life. My family had raised me to be a gentle, loving spider. *Charlotte's Web* was read to me at bedtime, no real shocker there. We were all vegetarians. That's all I ever knew. I had to eat bug beaters every day. I needed my protein, you know? My parents always said that you really couldn't even tell the difference. But, my grandfather said that there was nothing like the real thing. He said it was a daily struggle to stay on the wagon. He attended BBB meetings every week. He told me that if I stayed true to the new educated way of life, before I knew it, bugalism would be a thing of the past, and that we would all live together like they did in college. We would have jobs side by side and no more creature-gation. We have been working hard for years to gain our civil bug rights.

I digress. Sorry about that. I do tend to go off on tangents. Back to the point at hand. I was fresh off the silk truck, with all my eyes wide open, taking it all in. I went straight to my dorm room to see who my roommate was. I was paired with this fly from Indiana, with his little Hoosier hat on. His name was Franky Flygotti Jr. I know, it's horrible what names some people tie their children to. I bet you can't guess what he was majoring in at college. He was going to be in bug waste management. He said that it was tradition in his family. I soon came to realize that he was the son of none other than Franky Flygotti. He was the head of the micro-mob. He was someone that you wanted to do the bob and weave with. He would put your antennas out in a heartbeat. I was



really scared when I realized who this kid was. I mean, talk about the top of the food chain. I just wanted to weave myself into a corner and not come back out.

We became good friends and he was a cool Dipteran. He and I had a lot of classes together. I was an undecided major because I just wanted to discover myself. I thought everyone must take the core courses anyway, so I had plenty of time to have my epiphany on what I wanted to do with my life. I did originally think that I might follow in my family's footsteps and go into some field of public service. You know like bug politics or a social thorax worker. Like I said, I had plenty of time to decide I was young and ready to mingle with the other young co-eds. I was no bugist. Oh, you guys call it racist. I was down to date other species. This was my chance to find my spider mate after all.

Our first year of school went great, of what I can remember. Franky and I were inseparable and had really bonded. I was still taking my bug beaters every day. I was completely as innocent and white as my silk. Then, Thanksgiving came and Franky asked me to come home with him to meet his parents. He had told them so much about me that they wanted to meet me.

So, I packed a fresh spool of silk in my fly case to meet Franky's parents. I wanted to make a good impression on my best friend's parents. Not to mention that who knew what kind of job opportunities Franky the Fly could help me with. This was it, to meet the coolest and most powerful bugs on the entire east coast. I was networking on a global level. Harvard does provide opportunities that you would never imagine were possible. I was on my way.

Franky and I arrived at his parents' mansion, and the butler showed me to my room to get settled in. I was so impressed with this place that I fogged over all four pairs of my shades. I unpacked and was informed that everyone would meet me in the dining hall for dinner. It would be formal, and I should be downstairs promptly at 7:00 p.m. I got a fresh pair of dress slacks, my smoking jacket, and a nice hat. I almost forgot my reading glasses. Franky the Fly might want some of my business advice once he got to know me and saw how smart I was. I arrived at the dining hall promptly at 7:00 p.m. Franky Jr. and his parents were waiting on me by the dining table. Franky the Fly was shorter than I had imagined him. Mrs. Flygotti was a lovely older creature. We went into the pool room while dinner was being prepared. I told them I was a vegetarian. We discussed this at length, and they reassured me that this would not be an issue. I was so excited that we were all getting along so well, or so I

thought. Then out of nowhere this buffy beetle, seriously guys he had to be on centeroids, came at me wielding a machete. I started running for my life. Franky the Fly started laughing sadistically and saying that he wouldn't have some sub-species of spider associating with his boy. Franky Jr. passed out on the spot, but Mr. and Mrs. Flygotti were both in agreement on the likes of me. You must understand guys, when you are running for your life the saying fight or flight is very true. I tried, honestly, I did, to get out of there. But they had me locked in tighter than a can of worms. Something in me snapped. Let's just say granddaddy longlegs was right about once you have tasted the real thing, bug beaters are not the same. Franky Jr woke up and knew that I had only done what I had to do to save all my arms and legs. He said that he didn't want to be in this business anymore. Last I heard he was in the Bahamas tanning it up with a ladybug.

Mr. and Mrs. Flygotti still stick around their pad, even though they are bugergeists now. This place belongs to me, and I run the show. I decided to be the boss and master chef on the side. I found my calling after all. You see, I was the victim, and I just had to find my true purpose in life. I am only embracing my true nature as the big bug in the sky created me to do. So, help an arachnid out would you? Set the record straight.



# Lillian Spencer Award for Poetry

## Divine Destruction Ciara Lanman

You were focused on the road but I was focused on your face as the street lamps flashed on and off of it. Your hand in my lap the other on the steering wheel as we drove off in the moonlight. A goodbye prolonged by greedy lips craving to feel yours - but one more was never enough. One more sent me deep. You were the drug - the sweetest of them all. I was warned of drugs passed around the streets but never ones who harvested a heartbeat and lips soft as silk. Silk sent down from the gods and kissing you made me holy. I haven't been to church in years but the closest I've been is when our lips collided together like two planets - craving for destruction. And destruction is what we got. I haven't felt the same since. My body trembles at the remembrance of your fingertips and your lips creating crevices where they landed, making my body the perfect fit for yours. My ears ache to hear that laugh again - it sounded like all my favorite songs wrapped up into one. My brain can't stop replaying the memory of your smile - a smile that was handcrafted by the gods themselves and sent down from the heavens only to wreak havoc in my life. And I'd be damned to say that I couldn't wait for you to wreck me more.

# Lillian Spencer Award for Prose

White Heat  
Woodie Williams

He sat alone. Watching the moonlight echo off the dark surface of the water, he let his bare feet dangle and gently brush between dock and water. The damp air filling his lungs, he could feel the sweat slowly rolling down his chest and back. His blue polo began to stick. He stared into the great desert of marshes and forgot his own existence. He began to fade away. Only a gentle nudge brought him back from his dream.

He knew who it was before he even turned his head. The smell of Smirnoff, poorly hidden by Dentyne, was his only hint. He saw the blond ends as she lay upon his shoulder.

“Everyone’s about to head out.”

“I know.”

“We’ll are you coming or what?”

“Yeah, just zoned out for a second.”

“Okay, good. I hate being alone with all them.”

They laughed for a second, “They’re not too bad.”

“Not too bad when your crew’s around.”

He grinned and put his arm around her, holding her tighter than ever before, “Don’t worry I won’t ever leave you alone with that crew.”

“Even for Julia?”

His smile left, and he murmured, “not even for Julia.”

She felt his uneasiness and allowed it to grow. She enjoyed these

little moments, knowing he didn't know what to say. She knew he could always convince her to stay but enjoyed watching him sweat.

In the past she would cry trying to understand. Was she not good enough? She asked over and over what she had done wrong. Maybe if she hadn't nagged him so much. She shouldn't have teased him about other boys so much. But these were all lies, and she came to realize it. It was his fault and his alone.

She looked at him. She felt a pang of sadness. It had been months since she had truly examined him. She could see his thin cheeks beginning to fatten and his arms losing the muscle they once held. Even his eyes seemed different. Once so filled with life, they now seemed oddly empty and docile. She felt as if she were sitting next to a stranger.

She knew this was his way of preparing for college. Still this was the boy who danced with her all prom night and brought flowers for her senior recital and seemed so proud of her when he handed them over. This was the boy who spent long afternoons filling her ears with ideas that he promised were important and he had waited two months after she had said she was ready so he could know it was right.

Now all she saw was a shell of that boy. All she knew were the tears, heartaches, and apologies that filled recent weeks. She almost grew to resent him, but he always managed to bring her back. This wasn't just his approach with her. It was his approach with everything and everyone. It was as if he were a daring tightrope artist balancing himself above the stage of life, teetering closer and closer to his downfall without ever realizing it.

He regained his composure and kissed her.

"Looks like it's time to bail."

"Can't we just skip late-nighting and watch a movie at your place?"

"Sure, I bet my parents are asleep anyways, but what are you going to text your mom?"

"Same as I always do."

"Cool."

As they began to get up, he realized just how happy he truly was. This girl had been more than he could have ever asked for. She was his best friend. Melancholy crept onto him as he realized the few weeks of summer were all they had left. She was his first love, and who knew when he would find someone as perfect as her? He regretted all their recent fights. He even

regretted her parents hating him. He knew every time he left her family quickly filled her ears with “you could do better” and “you should move on,” but she stayed, and he was grateful.

She looked into his light green eyes and, for a second, swore she could see the brightness she had long forgotten about.

They walked idly up to the others.

The group consisted of one curly-haired, lanky white kid, an average looking white kid, and a third more athletic kid. They all dressed nearly the same: long white socks, polos, and khakis.

“Y’all ready for Spanks? Everyone else has already left.”

“Nah, I think we’re gonna chill and watch a movie at my place,” he responded.

“Chill huh? Your mom gonna walk in like last time?”

“If she does she’ll be in for a show,” he replied.

“Shut up! She will not,” she retorted.

“Alright, well just put a decent movie on so it’s somewhat believable.”

“We’ll do our best.”

The two of them got into his antique of a car. He had inherited it from his brother who inherited it from their grandmother. It was a dull red, scraped on both sides, and missing part of the rearview window. Inside, the seats were made with a sofa-like fabric. It was old enough that the front still had a middle seat, and this is where she sat. It only had a cassette player, where he kept Frank Sinatra at all times. “Younger than Springtime” began to play as they rode through the neighborhood.

He took the side streets to avoid the cops. They talked about the interactions of the night, like who hooked up with who and the fight over stolen alcohol. They laughed mostly and recollected on the scene they had caused a month before when she had nearly thrown his phone into a pool.

“I didn’t know who I was more scared for, my phone or me.”

“Well next time maybe you shouldn’t have Julia saved under Dad in your phone.”

“How was I supposed to know she keep sending me snaps? It was probably just a mass snap.”



“Oh, I’m sure she didn’t mean to send you one on prom night.”

“Well, jealousy does funny things to people.”

“Oh, I’m sure she’s the jealous one.”

The boy felt uneasy, but she didn’t care. She knew it was better to spend the summer together than alone. Sure, her family and friends lectured her about how she shouldn’t put up with it. There were other reasons as well, but she didn’t care. Her parents bored her, and her friends had never been in a relationship. She could leave him, but for what? To make her parents happy? To find some better boy who fit the ideal mold? No, this is what she wanted for now, and they were both happy with it.

He held her hand and let her head drop onto his shoulder.

“Why don’t we take Winters Street? That way we can get to watching that movie quicker.” he asked with a grin

“I don’t think that’s the best idea.”

“Aw, come on. Nothing’s going to happen.”

“Alright.”

He turned onto the street and slowed down, hoping to avoid attention. They were four blocks away when the boy reached is arm over and brought her closer. He began sliding his arm down her waist. She felt his warmth against her skin and began to kiss his neck. He swerved a little but quickly corrected the car. She continued kissing him and he continued moving his hand. She began to move her hand along his thighs. He swerved again.

Suddenly blue lights flashed from behind, and he pulled over.

“Fuck, this is my street. This is bullshit!”

“Oh, God. I can still smell the Captain Morgan on you.”

He reached for her purse and quickly pulled out her packet of gum.

“It’s okay he’ll let us go home, I’m sure.”

“What if he doesn’t?”

“Then I’ll just have to deal with it.”

“Like it’s that easy.”

She could see sweat beginning to form on his temple and his hands shaking rapidly. The reality was finally setting in.

"Do you think he'll arrest me?"

"I don't know."

"Everyone will find out."

"Just relax."

"All those moms will laugh at my mug shot. You know how they are!"

"No one's going to laugh at your mug shot."

"They'll brag about their kids never daring to do such a thing."

"No they won't. Just calm down."

"You don't get it. My life is ruined."

A knock on the window ended the conversation

"Sir, I pulled you over for failure to maintain lane."

"Officer, I live right down the street."

"I don't care, boy. Is that alcohol I smell?"

"No, sir."

"I'm going to need you to step out of the car, boy."

She could hardly see him in the dark. His body and the night seemed to be intertwined. All she heard was the car door opening. The boy did the tests and seemed to do them perfectly. His line was straight and his backwards alphabet was flawless.

"You're going to have to do the breathalyzer now, boy."

"I know the law. I passed your tests, now let us go home. I can see my front door from here."

"Well, you're not going home tonight, boy."

"Don't call me boy."

"I'll call you whatever I want, boy."

He walked closer, "Turn around and put your hands behind your back."

He did and prepared for the cuffs, but they never came. Instead, all he felt was his legs go out from under him as the officer swiped his feet. The girl, watching from the car, opened her door and stepped out.

"You can't do that!"

“Oh yeah? Why not? What? Are you going to run crying to your parents about your boyfriend? Look at you two. I’m sure everyone bites their tongues, but I know what they’re all thinking. ‘Why does a nice white girl like you have to go get all messed up with a nigger?’ No one will say it aloud anymore, but I will. You should be ashamed.”

Before the officer knew what happened, he was on the asphalt, the boy on top. The officer looked into his eyes and saw nothing but hate. They wrestled on the ground for a second, and the boy began to swing wildly at the officer.

“I’m not just some nigger.”

The officer reached for his gun and drew it out. The boy, trying to hold his arm back, put all his weight against the officer’s shoulder. The officer pulled the trigger. A flash lit up the night. Their ears ringing, the officer fired one more time, only this time a sudden shriek filled the night.

The girl lay in the street, blood slowly leaving her body. Her last thoughts were of nothing.

# Lillian Spencer Award for Art

Brighter Side  
Delaney Dusch



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# ABOUT CALLIOPE

Designed and published annually by students at Armstrong State University, *Calliope* offers students the opportunity to showcase their creative works and become published authors or artists.

The *Calliope* publishes selected submissions in the following categories: Poetry, Fiction, Creative Non-fiction, Plays, Visual Art, and Photography. Students are allowed unlimited submissions in as many categories as they'd like. All submissions are judged by the current editors, and the *Calliope* staff chooses the winners of the Lillian Spencer Award based on popular vote.

The submission website for the *Calliope* opens in the fall semester each year, typically after the new editor and staff are chosen.

Students interested in submitting their work for next year's *Calliope* or joining the staff should contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Robert Terry, at [robert.terry@armstrong.edu](mailto:robert.terry@armstrong.edu).



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