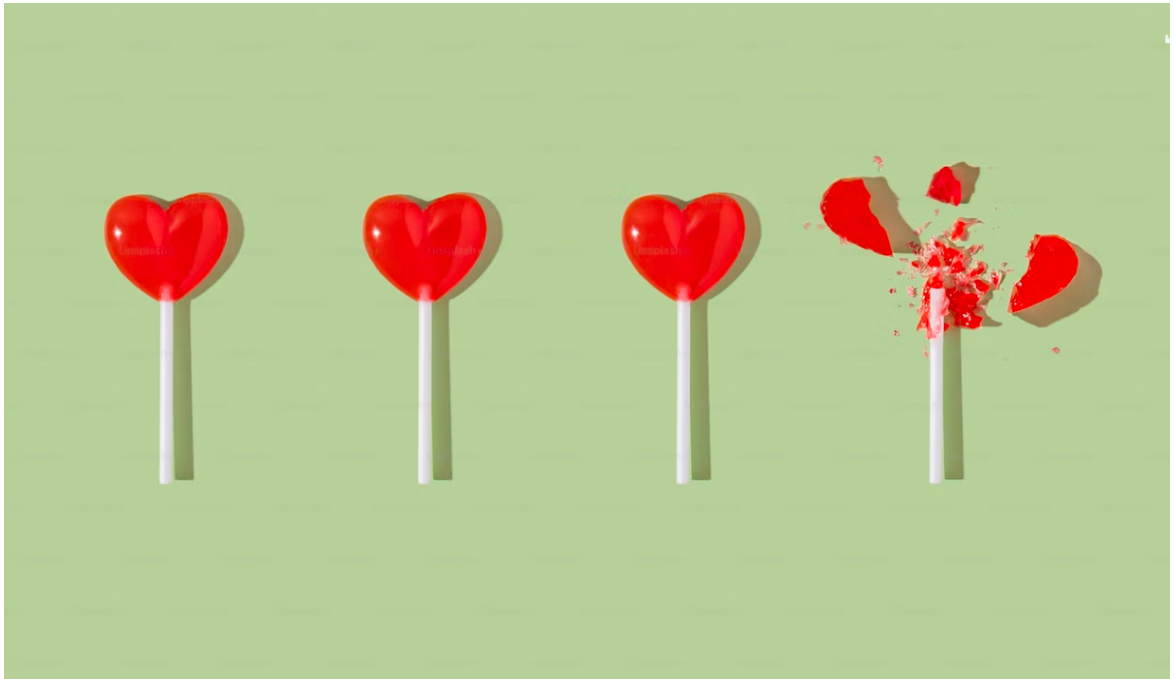


SILVER ROSE

MAGAZINE

Heartbreak
Anthology







SILVER ROSE
MAGAZINE

*Heartbreak
Anthology*

CONTENTS

FICTION AND POETRY

"Treif" | *Shoshana Lovett-Graff* | 7

"Dave" | *Candice Kelsey* | 11

"Many Moons" | *Claire Kortyna* | 15

"A Red Rose for Sinners" | *Ava Sofia* | 29

"My Heart in His Mouth" | *Lauren Dennis* | 43

"A Memory" | *Anthony Clemons* | 49

"Cerro Santa Lucia" | *Jason Hill* | 55

VISUAL ART

Interview with the Cover Artist |



Treif

Shir Lovett-Graff

I broke my mother's house. She cried when she learned what I had done. I peeled the heads off shrimp and sucked on their skins. I ate crabs with herbs and dipped their eyes in burning soup. I ate oysters, plates packed with lemon and treasured each puckered swallow. I told her the ocean was my mother now, and she could feed me better—I have lied all my life, since I was 15. After he left me I told the waiter I dropped my spoon on the floor. It was not metal but glass I dropped, each piece smoothed by a wave that looked small and perfect from the shore. By then, I had eaten everything I was afraid to step on as a child and still I crawled on the floor when he left. I remembered another lie—I told him I was allergic to his leaving, my mouth would swell and scales would break out on my legs. I wouldn't be able to speak any more, only a long line of sound drawn through the current. Sure enough, it was swollen now, right after he told me he had gazed deep into my broken bloody mouth and seen pearls sliced right in half—I wet my lips and ordered more. If I could

lie to my mother since I learned to eat alone, so could I continue to dip my spoon into broth that stunk of a thousand tiny deaths at the bottom of the ocean, so could I eat scallops from a box on my lap as I drove home, so could I swallow each soft part to soothe my broken, bloody, open mouth.

Shir Lovett-Graff is a writer, organizer and student at Harvard Divinity School. Their most recent work has been published in Poetry Online, TAB, The Westchester Review, and Pittsburgh Poetry Journal, and is forthcoming in Scapegoat Review, EcoTheo Review, and The Bangalore Review. They enjoy cooking experiments, walking around lakes, and bad reality tv. Their website is <https://www.shoshanalovettgraff.com/>



Dave

Candice Kelsey

upon visiting my father-in-law at his assisted living facility

You looked tennis club today—
court soft, smoothed comb, iced Diet
Coke hellos

But later court room returned— trial's golden child
radiating. Lexus full of purpose,
free hotel coffee on the bench seats,
legal pads on the dashboard,
corgi hair in the back,
a laminated saint— altar boy devotion.

What is lost when memory ceases
is the power to love

the once laughter, the lately empty
talk, the longing for recognition— we all want
closeness, but

distance wants us more.

Try, our conscience whispers. *Call*,
you trembling children. You drops of frozen rain.
Lost and lamenting Icarus'

waxy water. Hurricanes appear too often
which is why the coastal soul is steel. Wildfires protest,
but temperate days make new mazes green,
feathery, yarn-strewn. An extended hand.

Build wings from the candle drip. Step
into the primal cold.

CANDICE KELSEY teaches writing in the South. Her poetry appears in Poets Reading the News and Poet Lore among other journals, and her first collection, *Still I am Pushing*, explores mother-daughter relationships as well as toxic body messages. She won the 2019 Two Sisters Writing's Contest and was recently nominated for both a Best of the Net and a Pushcart. Find her at www.candicemkelseypoet.com



Many Moons

Claire Kortyna

The moon is a rightly melancholy sight as well as a beautiful one. It is a sphere of death—a picture of the state of a planet which air and water have left: it revolves, the skeleton of a world.

—Frank Sherwood Taylor, *The World of Science*

It appears on the edge of the earth, massive, dwarfing the black fringe of trees. Its light hums across the earth, citronella yellow, casting heavy shadows over the rough clumps of unshorn grass. We stand together, alone, in an empty field on the outer edges of the wood.

“Look,” I whisper, hushed breath trilling with excitement, “The full moon is rising.” Chris steps up behind me and I feel his nearness with my entire body. He bends down and kisses the side of my neck. “Isn’t it beautiful?” I ask. Chris says nothing. I settle my weight lightly against the slouched tallness of him, the one that makes his walk seem more like a lope.

I slide my hand into his. It hurts my fingers; the width of his hand

stretching mine a bit more than is comfortable. I pretend not to notice as I gaze at glory of the dawning moon.

An optical illusion makes the moon appear larger when it rises and sets, double or even triple its normal size. This happens because our brain sees the horizon as farther away than the sky. Attempting to reconcile this confusion, French astronomer Frederic Petit made the claim in 1846 that there were two moons: a large moon that circled the width of the earth and a smaller one that traveled around it vertically.

Lunar-related studies remained popular until the advent of a more advanced telescope at the end of the nineteenth century. Research shifted to the newly visible stars and lunar studies were abandoned to amateurs. It wasn't until American geologist Eugene Shoemaker led the development of an astrogeological branch of the U.S. Geological survey that interest in the moon rekindled. He gathered the base of geological information for lunar exploration, such as soil consistency and composition. Despite being considered an astronaut candidate, health complications held him back. A year after his death, his cremated remains were brought to the moon and left there. So far he is the only true man in the moon.

Were I to travel into space and behold that barren landscape before me, coated in harsh grating dust and heavily marked by the scars of time, I feel that I would lose the moon even as I beheld it. That clinical

observation would wrest from me my imaginative grasp of the moon, forcing a new, more technically accurate perception.

Would I still be able to look at it then and see more than rock and rubble, crater and crevice? Would I still see the talisman of my evening moments? Would I still feel wonder of it all? Constancy and change, isolation and connection, tight and knotted under my breastbone as I beheld the same moon all humans have seen since we first straightened our spines and gazed skyward.

The moon waxed gibbous the night Chris kissed me for the first time. We had snuck into the attic of the science building, tightrope walking along plywood boards suspended above insulation. In the absolute darkness he grabbed my hand to show me the ladder and my face burned at his contact. We climbed, pushed upward, scrambled on slate shingles. Then we were on top. We perched on the flat between two chimneys, closer to the moon, stars all around us, the river a distant, eddying blackness. The stiff breeze was too cold for comfort, but I scarcely noticed. I felt electric up there, each nerve sparking. I laughed, giddy with it.

Then he was close, a blue gaze burred thick with lashes. He kissed me. And when I shut my eyes I could still see the moon, brilliant white, against my lids. And later as I washed my face, the sink swirled black as dark smudges drained from the crest of my cheekbone, the curve of my

jaw. Soot, from where he had held me.

Maximilian Hell, a Hungarian astrologer who lived in the 1700s, believed that the light of the moon could impart special properties. Sometimes the moon slants through the gaps in my cheap vinyl blinds and bathes my bed in silvery light. Surely, if there's magic in the world, it's there—in that otherworldly glow. That bright contrasting light seems so incredibly valiant against the infinite emptiness, braver than any sun.

The moon is the only celestial object whose features we can see with our naked and weak human eyes. Across many cultures the moon is associated with love, longing, and romance. Its silent witness sets the scene for clandestine meetings, watching with a Mona Lisa smile. In Arabic, a common compliment is, "You are as beautiful as the moon." During the Italian Renaissance romantic personifications of the moon were widespread. The remnants of that custom are evident in aspects of contemporary Italian-American culture such as the 1987 film *Moonstruck*, starring Cher and Nicolas Cage. One of the main songs from the film's soundtrack, "That's Amore," contains the lyrics, "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie... That's amore." To see the moon is to love.

Chris is the one who took me to the party. He wanted me to meet his friends. I found him irresistible when eager: chiclet-sized teeth winking in a crooked grin, a single dimple playing hide-and-seek on his left cheek. Somehow, later that evening, I ended up in a graveyard,

grabbing the nearest headstone for support as I vomited hard into the grass.

It was late, around midnight or so. The night had a summery freshness to it and the moon shines harshly bright. But I was grateful for the deep darkneses it created across the graveyard. I crouched in one of them, attempting to shelter myself from shaming eyes. Love was in the air.

The vomiting was my fault, I let one of his friends make a drink for me, a stupid decision borne out of social anxiety and attempted politeness. The price I paid was the expulsion of every bodily fluid I possessed. Its moments like those when you find yourself quickly converting to paganism, worshipping natural things like the holy coolness of the night air, suddenly more sacred than any Bible. I tried to straighten, but nausea swamped me and I doubled over again retching in the graveyard across the street, cursing his stupid friends and my stupid decision with all the remaining strength in my stupid body.

Apparently this was a popular retreat and Chris eventually found me. Despite the location's convenience however, it takes a certain level of desperation to allow yourself to vomit while using a lovingly chosen headstone to bolster your rum-poisoned body. But I like to think that neither the moon nor the dead minded, understanding that certain measures were necessary to keep me where I was, above-ground and

agonizingly alive.

The stars, which seem ever-fixed, change with the season, but the moon is the same, no matter where you are. Although we consider ourselves inhabitants of a single planet, we live in a two-world system. Without the moon, Earth would not function.

It's a paradoxical feature. It changes, yet it stays the same. And there's an assurance there. The moon must leave the night sky, but invariably the darkness will end. Once terrifying changes become manageable and the cycle continues. The moon is our own contradictory transience and stability shining above us.

We live so much of our social lives at night, especially during the winter when darkness settles in before dinner. The pent-up emotions of the day and the thrill of work coming to an end make a potent cocktail of encounters, all pursued under the unjudging face of the moon. We feel freer in that forgiving light. We love and we lose at night. We know that it watches, but its gaze is gentle. The moon sees each of us as we are.

By the time Chris found me I was lucid enough to be afraid I had damaged his opinion of me or embarrassed myself in front of his friends. My sides ached and my palms were skinned from slipping drunkenly over the rough granite. He stroked my back.

"Hey there. Hey, our ride home is here, okay?" Chris murmured as he tried to pull me along, "We need to go." I flopped about unproductively like an

over-cooked noodle.

“Wait. Please,” I gulped air. Attempting to regain composure, I wiped at my face and hair, ignoring my damp cheeks and the bits of grass I found stuck to my lips. Then, out of nowhere, I said it, “I think, I think I love you.”

I can't remember his face in that moment. The memory of the encounter is obscure, as if I'm looking at it through the bottom of a thick glass. He muttered more, soothing things, *yes, yes, that's very nice, but seriously, we need to get out of here.* Then I was being helped over a fence I couldn't recall approaching and he was the one taking a quick break to vomit.

We somehow made it to the car. As we approached I realized someone's mother was driving a bunch of us home and reestablished control of myself with a snap: survival instinct, the show must go on. By the time she activated the automatic sliding van door to let us in my hair was twisted neatly back in its clip, my clothes straightened, and I entered with a smile, pleasantries armed on my lips.

In the second row Chris and I rode side by side, his hand lightly on my knee, mine stacked atop of that. Poised, we leaned into our performance, telling stories until the car filled with laughter. How responsible. How charming. And when the van pulled away, the scene ending, we rushed into the nearby woods, both of us heaving again within its sheltering arms.

Chris helped me up the stairs and into bed, moving my doll-like limbs into a passable sleeping position. I felt him tug the blankets up around me and lean in. He whispered my name twice. It caught my attention as I hovered at the edge of consciousness.

“Can you hear me?” There was insistence in the hushed question. His breath stirred the fine hairs next to my ear. Then, even softer, “I think I love you too.”

My mouth twitched a smile.

When the majority of humanity lived near the equator, the moon was considered just as powerful and important as the sun. But as people migrated to more temperate regions, they noticed the sun’s great influence on agriculture, which gave rise to a number of pre-Chris sun gods. The eventual arrival of Christy permanently demoted the moon. But if God is like the sun, whose brilliance cannot be gazed upon and whose light burns our tender human skin, then I think the moon is the soothing balm, the kiss after the slap, the benevolent face upon which we can stare freely and not be damned.

With the arrival of the scientific observation and later the telescope man’s view of the moon altered, both literally and figuratively. But despite this shift, the moon still functions as a benefic light in the world’s dark times, a screen on where people can project their hopes, dreams, and fears. It makes sense; this beacon is our nearest lighthouse amid the dark seas of the universe. The ideals of utopia can be placed in the sky, as well as the fears of

apocalypse. On an ever-shrinking earth, the moon remains a symbol of the imagination of humanity.

Two years later, its winter and the Internet won't stream. Chris and I are supposed to be watching a something together. We lay side-by-side. Our relationship is dissipating like wet paper. I feel the frigid night air seep through the thin windowpanes although his body gives off waves of heat. The reality of the cold seeps into my skin and I shiver.

"I just want to be with you." Chris speaks into the space over our heads. "So why is this always so hard?" I can't answer. I couldn't put into words what I felt then: that I was always chasing him, bending and warping myself just to feel like he wanted me as much as I wanted him. That I couldn't keep it up. Resentment settled in like salt.

"I don't know." I make my voice calm and practical. "I don't know what we should do." The sentence ends in a whisper, shriveling up in my mouth, afraid to come out.

"I just don't want it to be over," he says. I turn away from the circle on his laptop, where it scrolls in a ceaseless loop. The smell of him still soothes me. My tears make a quiet damp on the pillow. Outside the moon is a brittle sliver in the sky, like a fingernail clipping.

Winter blows the color from the trees, leaving a skeletal landscape in its wake. The days are short and cold. The sun clarifies the world when it

shines, illuminating light and color. But against the darkness of the night sky, the moon seems even whiter than the sun—yet the moon's light leeches all pigment from the world and leaves behind an earth that is both hauntingly similar and inextricably foreign, an expanse of grays. As Proust explains, who could resist being captivated by, "the ancient unalterable splendor of a moon cruelly and mysteriously serene."

In American culture we see the face of a man in the moon. This phenomenon is called lunar pareidolia: creating illusory images from the surface features of the moon, such as those formed by ancient lava flows. The man in the moon has always appeared agonized to me, with sorrowful downward tilted eyes and ragged gaping mouth. In traditional European lore they see a full man in the moon, old and hunched under the bundle of sticks he carries across his back. According to Christian lore he has been eternally condemned for violating the holiness of Sunday and now must live alone in the moon. In India, the moon features the two outward-reaching hands of Ashtangi Mata, the mother of all things. She had to send her twin, Chanda, into the sky to become the moon and the stars. The dark spots that mark the moon's surface are from when Ashtangi Mata gently brushed Chanda's cheeks in one final farewell.

Since the moon is without an atmosphere, footsteps left there by astronauts will be there forever. Millennia from now, even if there is no trace of humanity left on earth, aliens could find evidence of mankind on the moon.

A few weeks after our relationship ended we stood by the dresser, our

bodies close but not touching. We kept smiling at one another, painfully happy. Being near again a delight, a despair. I relished anew the familiar fuzz of his earlobes, the dark mole nestled underneath, the pink one at the base of his throat. My fingers knew where all the moles on his back would be; I had learned the hidden braille of his body.

“Sometimes I worry that no one will love me as much as you do,” Chris whispered as he picked up my chapstick and began taking off the lid and putting it back on. It cracked shut each time. He chuckled, “You probably don’t feel that way, do you?” Crack. Crack.

I shrugged and reached for him. Fisted my fingers, then reached again. I wanted to comfort him—to tell him that it wasn’t true. But I didn’t know. Crack. I knew he was selfish, but it always felt so boyish to me, unintentional, immature. I never held him accountable, I couldn’t. I reached again and ran my thumb across the top of his. Chris turtle-ed his thumb away into the shell of his fist. Crack.

I gave a small laugh and said, “I don’t know. I have to believe I will find someone who wants to be with me as much as I want to be with them.” We kept punctuating our conversation with laughter, as if the small sounds of amusement could mask the terrible weight of what we were saying.

“Come here.” He tugged me forward by the front corner of my shirt, his other arm curled around my waist and reached up to cup the nape of my neck—the way it always did. And then my fingers were tangled in his hair and

my nose was tucked against his collarbone. And the smell of him, the aching smell of him, was all around me.

“You should go.” I said after some time. I plopped my heels back against the ground and forced distance between us.

“Okay.” Chris turned, then looked back at me, “Promise me you won’t cry when I leave?”

I swallowed and nodded, “I promise.” I added a smile.

There are no noises on the moon. Sound cannot travel through nothingness: it needs air or water. Astronauts who visited the moon were only able to communicate via radio using the air filling their helmets. The landing, the takeoff, the metal striking against metal, all of it happened silently. The moon keeps many secrets and not a whisper leaves its lips.

After Chris left, I stayed in one place until I heard the door downstairs rattle shut. On the dresser was the cap he’d left off my chapstick. I put it back on. Crack. Outside the sun set, the darkness rose. And there was no moon.

Claire Kortyna's work has been published in *Blood Orange Review*, *The Maine Review*, *The Baltimore Review* and others. She is a nonfiction PhD candidate at the University of Cincinnati. She reads for *The Cincinnati Review* and The Sewanee Writers' Conference.



A Red Rose for Sinners

Ava Sofia

She is the reason for my self-destruction. We weren't meant to meet. That's what I tell myself—that it was all just a fuck up caused by fate.

Scarlett slouches against the torn leather seats of the diner, her fingers tracing our initials that are etched out with a butter knife—lines sharp and disconnected. She is cold and lifeless, a snapshot of misery. A red rose rests on the napkin holder, a white ribbon tied around it—the only way I know how to present my love to her.

She ignores my pleading glances, my fingertips lingering on her wrist, my quick words explaining my sins. That's at least what my mother would call them. Sins. The reason for my quick slit tongue and impulsive decisions. I could blame these immoral acts of wickedness on the way I was raised, my eviction from the church, or the people who encouraged and forced my wrongdoings. However, I'm unsure whether making excuses would minimize or expand my list of immoralities.

"I'm so sorry. You have to understand, I-," Scarlett unrolls the silverware from the paper napkin, grabbing the knife and slicing a line through the heart that surrounds our initials, "Stop it! Please, just at least look at me!"

I watch as Scarlett attempts to punish me for my loose values and bloodied hands, casting away my empty promises. Her hands tremble as she digs the knife in deeper, defacing the letters that once resembled us. Destroying all that was once good. At this moment, I want to grab the knife and slice open her palm, to make her feel the torment of watching something once so innocent become scarred and wounded. I want to deface the proof of her identity and realness. Instead, I grab her wrist, the knife sliding across the table as she snags her arm away from my touch. She stands from the booth, her fleece jacket falling from around her shoulders and exposing her skin, her body trembling in both anger and agony.

"Oh fuck you! I don't want to hear it anymore!" She digs into her pocket for her wallet, throwing three one-dollar bills on the table to pay for her untouched milkshake, "I'm done. I mean it this time too, I'm done with us."

She grabs the rose and throws it to the floor, crushing the petals under the sole of her boot. They bleed against the tile and stick in the crevices of her shoe, leaving the rose of my love crushed but also lingering.

This isn't a confessional, one where I am absolved from all of my

sins. She is not my religion or my God. But I was supposed to be hers.

We met during Sunday school when we were twelve. She told me that her grandmother took custody of her after her parents were arrested. To cure her of all the destructive traits and beliefs she was taught by them, her Grandmother forced her into the church and enrolled her in the all-girls private school a few towns away—the one my mother couldn't afford to send me to. My mother was a woman of the church, she prides herself for her charity work and dutiful servitude to her lord, but also steals money from her "House of God" to afford her rent and groceries. However, the only sins she ever believed in were always the ones that didn't affect her or her own unrighteous actions.

Scarlett instantly intrigued me. I became envious of her beauty. Envious of her smooth skin that was clear of scars, imperfections, or extra baby fat. Of the way her clothes lacked stains or rips—everything she owned was handmade by her grandmother, each dress stitched with lace trim. How her vision was perfect and teeth were straight and how every freckle looked flawlessly placed. Of how valuable and breakable she looked, a fragile porcelain doll placed in a world of insufficiency. Most of all, how she knew she was beautiful.

I saw how the altar boys would look at her, how they'd hide under the open stairwell to get a peek up her dress when she left the building. She was considered the sexual awakening to the naive Catholic boys, whispering affirmations in their ear and leaving the sticky residue of lip

gloss against their cheeks. When her breasts grew in, she used to pull the pubescent boys into the alleyway behind the church, right next to the overflowing dumpsters and the hearse. They'd give her five dollars and she'd pull up her shirt and give them a minute to stare at her growing bosom. Then we'd spend it on milkshakes and split a burger at the diner down the street, or buy the twenty-five pack of lollipops that would make our tongues red and scratchy.

She had a way of making me feel worthy and needed, yet, she also made me feel inadequate. My mother used to compare her beauty to mine. Scarlett was the ideal blonde hair, blue-eyed, pale skin child that you'd see in every magazine and photoshoot. My mother craved to have a daughter that was modest but also brought in enough cash through beauty pageants and ad campaigns. She wanted a daughter that she could dress up in pink frilly dresses and kitten heels, whose hair was thin enough to curl and lips were plump enough to paint in any color. She wanted to be told her daughter was beautiful by passing strangers or to be approached by modeling agents. Scarlett gave her what I never could—someone to brag about.

The word "perfection" has always left a bitter taste in my mouth, a sickly sour against my tongue. It reminds me of the acidic burn that comes from sucking on hard candy until the flesh is left raw and pulsating. The blue residue on my tongue is a reminder of that aching emptiness within myself—the reminder of my flaws and vulnerabilities. I was six when I learned how to critique my appearance, making braces out of tinfoil and

string to try and fix the gaps within my teeth. I was eight when I cut bangs in my hair because you could see a subtle blue vein that flowed through my forehead like a stream, carrying with it the blood of my own self-doubt and humiliation. I was ten when I developed an uneasiness towards food, knowing that each bite could easily add another pound to my smooth youthful skin. I always held the desire within me to be viewed as perfect, to meet the expectations that everyone else had placed on me like a crown covered in emeralds and self-loathing. Scarlett made these insecurities skyrocket, perhaps because I now had someone to compare myself to and realize all the flaws I hadn't before, or perhaps because she helped me realize that I was never going to be the person everyone else wanted me to be.

When we were sixteen, a boy named Drew asked me out. That night Scarlett and I huddled under butterfly-printed blankets, legs intertwined and hair tickling each other's noses. I was so scared of what having a boyfriend meant. I cried over how he probably expected me to kiss him and how I didn't want to embarrass myself. I was afraid that my lip would get stuck in his braces, or that I'd accidentally bite his tongue, or that I would use too much saliva and he would be able to taste what I had for lunch that day.

Scarlett pressed her hands against either side of my face and kissed me that night, slow and warm, awkward and full of giggles. She said it was "practice for the real thing." An opportunity to learn what side

to tilt my head and how to move my lips against someone else's. I kissed her for almost an hour, basking in her delicacy and the secrecy of our actions. Hiding my affections for her by saying that kissing her didn't count.

We never talked about the kiss.

Two years later, Scarlett found a new girlfriend, an inner-city liberal who embraced her sexuality and femininity. It took another two years and three failed boyfriends for me to give in to her temptations again. A night of drunk obscenities in her college dorm room. I curled up on her lap as she stroked my hair, my lips brushing against her bare thighs as I spoke. Drunken slurs turned into pleads for acceptance, my face soaked in snot and tears as I admitted everything. She kissed me again that night, less adolescents and expectations, just two bodies existing in a cramped dorm room. When I woke up in her twin-sized bed beside her, our bodies slick in sweat from the broken air conditioner and breath reeking of spice, I told myself I would hold onto that moment forever.

We never made our relationship official, but she broke up with her girlfriend and we spent almost every night together. I suppose we both came to a mutual silent agreement that things were different between us now. That labels weren't needed to express what we meant to each other. Or maybe the lack of labels made it easier to hide, easier to destroy.

I wanted her to be my secret, or perhaps for her to keep us a

secret. I feared leaving our sanctuary and stepping into the real world where people wouldn't find her as beautiful as I did. I would catch our reflections in shop windows, hands intertwined and steps in sync. It didn't look real. It was an illusion, a mirage of what I hoped my reality would one day look like. The image of us was stolen away by the judgmental stares of society, the mother covering her child's eyes when Scarlett leaned in to kiss me, the teenage boys yelling slurs out the car window as they passed us.

I began to notice the consequences of our relationship two weeks later. "Just ignore them, their opinions don't matter," she told me as I ran a warm washcloth under her blackened eye. The repercussions of letting a man buy her a drink and then telling him she had a girlfriend. After a slew of "I could change you" and "you just haven't had a good dick yet," she spilled the drink over his white collared shirt. He punched her, spit in her hair, and threatened her "misconception" of a life. I cried more than her that night, though I wasn't sure if it was because of the pain she faced for loving me or because her face was no longer beautiful. I feared the day when the black eye would heal and I would no longer be the one with the prettier face. I had visions of pushing my thumb deep against the bruising, hearing her yelp as her skin swelled and oozed. I loved her more when she was deformed.

Our relationship after that was on and off for two years, a myriad of fears and anger about what we truly represented. A constant hatred of

who we were together, paired with the desperation to never be apart. She would sneer when I'd introduce her as a "close friend" and I'd cry when in return she'd get a pretty girl's number. She hated my insecurity and I hated her inability to understand where these insecurities came from. It always followed the same format—silence turned to snide remarks, which escalated to screams and cruel words, which ended in a breakup, and started again the next day when I'd show up at her door with a single red rose and half-hearted apology.

I was twenty-three when I stood in her kitchen and watched her strain noodles as she swayed her hips to the Christmas carols that played through her phone speakers. We were at my parent's White Elephant brunch just hours before. When it was my turn to select and open a present, I chose the smallest box on the table, afraid of appearing selfish if I reached for one any bigger. When I tore off the wrapping paper and slid off the lid, there was a free coupon for a spa day. My mother giggled and winked at Scarlett, "Lucky you, maybe a day at the spa will help you finally give this pretty girl a run for her money." Scarlett winced and I faked a laugh, running a finger over my nose to examine the pores and dry skin. Always inadequate when next to the girl who was supposed to make me feel beautiful.

In her kitchen, I found myself scrutinizing her every move. She asked me to pass the alfredo sauce, and as I reached for the jar, this unencumbered jealousy filled me. "I wish you weren't prettier than me," I

admitted as I twisted off the cap and listened to the pop and release of air, “Do you know how difficult it is to be the ugly one in the relationship? To never be enough in people’s eyes when I stand next to you?” I walked around the counter and poured the cream into a pot, ignoring Scarlett’s eyes burning into me. “Society hates us, well, hates me. You’re too pretty to be hated, too perfect. I mean, girls like you are the reason lesbian porn is the number one category on porn sites. Society will never accept me until I look like you. It’s cruel.”

When I looked back at her, she had tears in her eyes and her lips were twisted in a sinister scowl. She always cried when she was angry, her screams invalidated by her damp eyelashes and quivering lips. It used to be one of my favorite things about her because she never scared or intimidated me—never pushed me against a wall as I struggled to catch my breath from her verbal inflictions. It was almost comforting, a way to remind me that she is in fact human. However, as she reached for the scissors from the knife stand, choked up sobs escaping her throat, I wished that the tears would dissipate. I wanted her growls to rumble through the kitchen, her teeth bared and face turning a deep pink. When she cried it made me feel like it was my fault, but when she just screamed I could convince myself it was her own self-hatred

She gripped her blonde hair in her free hand, twisting it around her knuckles and pulled it taut. “Is this what you want?” she whimpered, “You want me to be less ‘pretty’? You want me to be your ideal man without

the dick to show for it? Fine!" The scissors began to gnaw through her hair, covering the tile in golden strands of desperation. I wanted to fall to my knees and gather it up, mold it onto my own scalp, make it mine. The scissors brushed against her throat with each slice, and I wished that it would cut her, mark her with a scar as a punishment for throwing away something so beautiful. She marched away to the bathroom once she saw me sobbing over her hair rather than her pain. Seconds later, I listened to the sound of clippers switch on. The proof of her beauty, gone.

She told me a few months ago that she was afraid of me. That she was frightened of the way I would look at her, how I was consumed with the idea of defacing her. She laughed about it when she saw the anguish on my features, nudged my shoulder, and forced out a "But I know you'd never really hurt me." We never spoke about it again, but I could see the terror in her eyes when someone would mention her beauty in front of me or tease her for her low standards. Sometimes I scared myself too.

The day after she chopped off her hair, I sat on my mother's floral couch, chamomile tea shaking in my hand and eyes lingering on the lit fireplace. I didn't want to tell her about Scarlett, about how I have both loved and destroyed her. She was my secret, my hidden taboo in my world full of impiety.

My mother had made me a dating profile though, one that only singles from the Catholic faith were supposed to go on. She took photos

of me from our family vacation three years ago when I hadn't stripped away the baby fat or learned how to properly handle the unruly curls my father gave me. I suppose I looked innocent, bare of the knowledge I have now. She messaged these men on my behalf, over-exaggerating my dedication to the church and my apparent need to become the perfect housewife and mother. She showed me the photographs of her favorite suitors, some obvious catfishes only on the app to get nudes from naive girls and others lying about their age by at least ten years. All of them had names like Joseph, John, or Adam. I told her I didn't need nor want a man, but her insistence, along with her inviting one of the bachelors to a family dinner, caused me to scream the words I never expected to leave my lips. Words admitting to my repressed sexuality and love for the girl my mother used to idolize.

My mother slapped me that night. A bruise from the band of her diamond ring still imprinted on my cheek. The sound of her palm snapping against my skin rippled through the living room, the hatred in her eyes screaming louder than my gasps. She wrapped her hand around the cross pendant I wore around my neck, looking up at me and spitting in my face, "Don't you dare do this to me."

As I whispered out an apology, she tugged the necklace free from my body and stuffed it in her pocket, ordering me to leave.

That night, I asked Scarlett to meet me at the diner the next day. As I stare at her and the patchy tufts of blonde hair on her scalp now, the

only face I can see is my mother's—the critical stare of a woman who knows that I will never accept myself. I no longer see a woman who loves me, but one who pities me for my inability to love fully and see past the vanity that consumes me.

I chose her. I walked out on my mother and the religion she raised me on. I accepted my inadequacy and my need to scar her. I came to terms with my inability to be perfect. But she didn't choose me. In the end, everyone knew she was never going to.

I try to feel our connection as she walks away, my crushed rose beneath her boot validating the beliefs of my own unworthiness. I scrunch my eyes close and pray to feel the warmth that just the mere thought of her used to bring me. I don't feel her anymore. As I watch her leave the diner—the one where we spent her back alley money, where I carved our initials into the table to prove our existence, and where she first admitted her love for me—I feel nothing.

Numb. Defeated. Finally earning my mother's label as a sinner.

Ava Sofia is a full-time student at Emerson College, obtaining a BFA in Writing, Literature, & Publishing, with a minor in Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies. She writes short contemporary fiction that revolves around the rawness of reality and interpersonal bonds. Her stories focus on not only the beauty of queer relationships, but also their societal and personal hardships. Although originally from Northern California, she has lived in thirteen different cities across three countries, and is currently residing in Boston, Massachusetts, with her closest friends.



My Heart in His Mouth

Lauren Dennis

I gave my neighbor a heart-shaped cookie, both for the reason you're thinking (I like him) and a different reason (I had one left and he was outside doing yard-work). He didn't accept my heart cookie. He has a wife, he reminded me. He gave me the same reminder when I asked in the middle of the loneliest summer if he wanted to go camping together (in separate tents). I have a wife. She's stuck in Vietnam with their daughter (who I've met) and a son (who he's never met).

The cookie wasn't obviously a heart. The shape was a circle, with a heart inside, popping through with messy jam. Like a heart does.

He told me he doesn't eat sweets in the morning.

I told him I don't either, but I just had one, and it wasn't that sweet. It is hard to take 'no' for an answer when I am standing there with my messy jelly heart in my hands, which I most often am.

He kept looking at me, and shook his head. I think he dyed his hair. I preferred his COVID greys popping through.

The day I told him that his hair was getting long, he cut it.

I liked it long, but I liked it more that he did a thing based on a thing I said.

"I'm making the garden for my wife, when she comes back." He told me.

"Yes, then she'll never want to leave." I smiled. He turned away from me then, and went back to gardening. I think I offended him. She left the first time to give birth to their son, the one he still hasn't met. Because she went back to Vietnam to give birth to him. My neighbor was lonely but content. I could tell from the way he inhaled his cigarette late at night in the summer, when I was in my hammock and he didn't know I was there.

He lets me borrow his lawn mower. I didn't know how to mow my lawn. Because I was divorced. Because my husband. He didn't mow the lawn either. But he left me with more than half of the house debt, so I can't afford to hire the Vietnamese person that used to cut my lawn. I hope my neighbor didn't notice that he was Vietnamese. That all these years I have paid someone to cut my lawn. Like this

rich white person. I was.

Now I cut my own lawn with my Vietnamese neighbor's mower. Sometimes he sits in his backyard sipping iced coffee while I do it. We both ingest the fumes and he smiles at me when I make a mistake. I hear the clink of the ice in his glass when I stop the mower too often and make up for our language difference with sighs and pluckish poses. I wear cut off shorts, just like the teenage boys that used to cut my lawn when I was growing up and my sister and I would sip the red juice on the patio and watch them. I want him to watch me like that while he swallows his deliberate sips of iced coffee. And he usually does.

When I return the lawn mower, I do it more precisely than I would if it were mine. I am gentle with it, so he can see how gentle.

His wife was never there

when she was here

She would pull up in the yellow sports car that now sits in his driveway, drop off their daughter and leave.

I don't remind him of this. I hope he gets to meet his son soon. One night, he sees me in the hammock and starts to talk to me. I come close to the fence, too close for these times, and he talks to me about

his dad. How he was gone for most of his life, in a prison in Thailand, until his family got amnesty, and that's why they were here. I listen and smell his fresh cut grass on the other side of the fence. I want to reach through the chain link to the place where it hurts him when he talks. I can see which part it is, because he breathes the smoke out through his nostrils, not his mouth when he gets there. He looks up at my tree. "That's nice, to have a tree like that." I agree and ingest the night, his smoke, and tell him I like it when he apologizes and tries to blow it the other way.

I wanted him to take my heart cookie. To bite it and roll the jam on his tongue and look at me while biting it across our chain link fence. I wanted it to be too much for him, too dry (it was too dry) and need to go inside and drink water and when he came back out, I would already be inside and he would be left cutting grass with the dry taste of my heart

in his mouth.

Lauren Dennis is a mother of two, violently fighting against the confinement that may or may not come with that title. She writes because she has to, and has been published in Scarlet Leaf Review, The Flash Fiction Press, daCuhna, and Microfiction Monday Magazine. She has received formal critique and feedback from the Lighthouse Writer's Workshop in Denver, Colorado, where she resides.

ARCHITECTURE

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

...in a manner which is in accordance with the principles of...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Graphic Expression and Figure Drawing

...elimination. As in the hieroglyphic paintings of the ancient Egyptians, the scientific plan must be adopted, not the analytic. Unnecessary details must be passed over; essentials only included, with as few telling lines as possible.
...Mr. P. B. Ballard, Mr. E. R. Taylor, and others...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

1. Imaginative sketch by an infant of six...
...The key object is a coat-hanger. The key object should always be associated with the story-telling. Teacher's analysis in these stages (1, 2, 3) drawn it. Likewise teacher's rendering of the actual coat-hanger, after child has first overcast in the cupboard...
2. Infant sketch of "Washing Day". Not exaggerated size of pegs and want of droop in suspension of the clothes. Teacher's demonstration drawings of pegs (two varieties) are here may be suspended for the purpose in the schoolroom.



PLATE I

...generated by shading...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

NATURAL AND COMMON OBJECTS

...arrangements of simple articles...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

NATURAL AND COMMON OBJECTS

...arrangements of simple articles...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

NATURAL AND COMMON OBJECTS

...arrangements of simple articles...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

Free-Arm and Industrial Drawing

...to the lumber room. The teacher...
...the teacher's rendering...
...the child's mind, and that it should be...

A Memory

Anthony Clemons

Do you

ever think of our
cramped, thin-walled duplex?
or the hushed moments,
splayed against the liminal
surface of a worn double
mattress, pitted against
summer's heat,
windows open
for all to hear?
how about us tussling
between the contours

of thin sheets on cold
winter nights, hidden in
quilted refuge?

Can you

hear a siren wailing,
attending to some event?
at daybreak, power is called
to mass elsewhere. there's
no solace in artificial scarcity.
the choice of producing
a final naked embrace
happens as sunlight cuts
through windowpanes—
beating us from our harem—
conceding what we
couldn't, willingly.

See the

force connecting us

to the event, refracting
the intimate wavelengths
to another purpose
for tomorrow,
to others?

I know

we both

did.

Anthony Clemons is an Appalachian writer and poet. He holds an M.F.A. in Nonfiction Writing from Goucher College. His words appear in *Harvard Review*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, *The Daily Drunk*, and elsewhere. Follow him on Twitter and IG @anthonycclemons.



Cerro Santa Lucia

Jason Hill

Pigeons do not mark the passage of time. Since sometime in the eighteenth century, the cannon atop Cerro Santa Lucia in Santiago de Chile has fired a single shot at noon every weekday. And every day, the pigeons scatter wildly at the sound. People have a sense of time but some of them startle, too. Tourists and new arrivals jump and look around for the source of the noise, the explosion. Just as I did the first few times until I got used to the ritual. Even those who have lived in Santiago their whole lives occasionally forget that they are supposed to be inured to the sound and, when they are lost in their thoughts and preoccupied, you can see them jump, blown out of their reveries. Whether they are troubled or simply day-dreaming, you can guess by their reactions, which are either curses or sighs, or small laughter.

It would be incorrect to say that Ignacio was the only person I never saw react to the cannon because, of course, hundreds of people walked by me every day without casting a glance upward at noon. But when I consider the number of times I happened to be near Ignacio when the cannon fired, it

begins to seem remarkable that I never once saw him so much as flinch at the noise.

Ignacio owned the bodega across the intersection from one of my favorite cafes on the Calle el Rosal, a nice little vegetarian place near a theater that showed foreign films, the main reason I was willing to make the trip to the center of town, sometimes several days a week, from Bellavista where I stayed. From my seat outside the café, I could just see the top of Castle Hidalgo on the cerro and had a direct view to the front of Ignacio's bodega, which was a typical sort of thing for South America, with a blue awning advertising Pepsi and signs for Bilz and Pap and the different services offered such as printing and copying. I only had the afternoons to judge by, but business was slow compared to what I guessed was a decent amount of rent, given the location.

Most days that I was there, Ignacio leaned against the half-door at the front of his shop and tossed rolled balls of bread into the intersection for the pigeons to feed on. Whenever the cannon went off, or a heavy motor thundered by, the pigeons fluttered into the air before returning to the bread. Ignacio, on the other hand, never moved, never even paused in the rhythm of tearing a small piece from the loaf in his hands and pinching it into a ball before tossing it some ten or twelve feet with a flick of his wrist or sometimes shooting it off his forefinger with his thumb like he was playing marbles.

I eventually met Ignacio not at his place of business but at a poker

game to which I had been invited by a mutual acquaintance, Gael.

Gael lived in Bellavista and we met one night at El Galinto, the only pub in my neighborhood that served draft beer that wasn't Cristal. The exact moment of our meeting is lost to me, but I remember that I was reading a paperback I found in a second-hand store specializing in English-language books. Gael introduced himself and asked if I liked the book and when I said yes, he asked what part of the States I was from.

I am over six feet with blue eyes and light hair, and so I stood out among the chilenos. It is nothing to assume that I am North American, but to ask what part of the States I am from is the same as to declare that you have lived in America and are familiar with regional differences. When I told him that I was most recently from New Jersey, Gael frowned slightly and said that he would have guessed the South, based on my accent.

I told him that I was originally from the South, but I hadn't lived there in many years. I then said that I was surprised because most of my friends did not think I had any accent at all. I had, in fact, worked to lose my accent when I went away to college more than two decades before because of the attention it drew. I did not mention this part to Gael, though.

Because he originally spoke to me in English, our conversation had continued that way, but now I switched to Spanish and asked him how he knew the regional accents in the States.

He smiled at my use of his language. I lived there for six years, he said. In Delaware.

Delaware, I repeated. I don't think he could have named anywhere more bewildering. Even when you live next door to it, Delaware just isn't a state you think of very often unless you are planning to incorporate.

Why were you in Delaware? I asked.

My cousin lives there. He has an import business and I worked for him while I went to school at the university.

The Blue Hens, I said.

Gael laughed and said, Yes, that's right.

We chatted briefly then, about universities and the Northeast.

What brings you to Chile? he asked.

Just traveling, I said to him. I told him that I had recently concluded some work that had paid me well enough that I could afford not to work for a while. I told him I wasn't sure what to do with my days now that I no longer needed to work as much, that I was taking time to think about my next step. It was distasteful to tell him my situation, which, while honest, made me sound like some rich American, even by American standards.

How long have you been here? Gael asked.

Nearly four months. So maybe I am not so much traveling as visiting.

Why Chile?

I could not tell him that my decision to visit his country had come with almost no thought, spurred by the death of someone who had spent time here after college. And I couldn't answer him with the admission that I

had come to Chile to escape my life and what had been, for many years, a good marriage, but one that was now coming to an inescapable end.

Bolaño, I said and held up my book, a non-answer that Gael seemed to understand even though the book was by DeLillo and not Bolaño.

You are a writer? he asked.

I said I was not, but I knew writers. And then I told Gael a story about myself, one that I made up on the spot and borrowed heavily from a friend who really was a writer. The strange thing, which I suppose I should have expected, was that the story later turned out to be true because, whether I was creating or confessing, it had come from inside of me, dressed in words and draped in a sense of time drifting forward. It was the story of a man without obligations, or who had left behind his obligations because he no longer recognized the people to whom they had originally been made. And as I told him this, I knew it was true, all of it except for some details here and there, like the fact that more than the people to whom I made promises, it was my younger self, the one making those promises, who had become unrecognizable.

Gael didn't know better than not to believe my story, not to sense that I was putting him off without wanting to drive him away. Or maybe, like most people, he didn't care whether I lied to him or to myself about anything so personal. He nodded at my answer.

I knew a writer when I lived in Delaware, Gael said. He worked at the university, but I never had a class with him. His wife was friends with the wife of my cousin, and we were introduced at a party. Later, I played poker with him. We

played every week. It was a good game.

And that was how I came to play in Gael's game. It was a cash game, very friendly, with no more than the equivalent of forty dollars changing hands every week. It was also how I met Ignacio.

I forgot to mention Ignacio's scar. It was distinctive, visible even from across the way as he leaned out the door of his shop. It was thin but deep, and very pale against his skin, running from just under his left ear to the middle of his throat. The scar, and his thick head of tall dark hair, made him unmistakable and I recognized him right away when I arrived the first night at Gael's. Seeing him up close for the first time, it was his expression, almost immobile with what seemed a distant concentration, that seized me. He had a strong face that never changed when he was betting at cards or, I realized, when he fed the pigeons in the square.

The game was played every week in Gael's house in his basement. Incidentally, Gael's was the only house in all of Chile that I was ever in that had a basement. It was built originally as a wine cellar, I think, and its walls were cut stone with mortar between the blocks, and arches separating three different rooms off the center space where the stairs were. Only one of the rooms, or alcoves as would be equally accurate to say, retained its original purpose. The others had shelves filled with books and some cigar boxes, glasses and a few plates, and, on the lower half of one wall, a small refrigerator and a deep-set double sink with one of those tall, goose-neck faucets you see on television or in an old farmhouse.

In the center space of the basement that was maybe two hundred square feet total, comfortable chairs sat against the wall, one or two of them leather. The middle of the room was occupied by a table that was both a card table and a small dining table, depending on how it was folded and which surface was presented. This is where we played our game.

Typically, the game ran for several hours starting around seven or eight in the evening and continuing until close to midnight. At that time, the opposite hour of the cannon's loud pronouncement, those who had to work in the morning would turn up their glasses and drain the last of their chosen drinks, following the action with a sigh or some soft noise of resignation. Then they would stand and apologize for having to leave with our money or, depending on their luck, condemn us for having robbed them.

Sometimes, after the others had gone, I would linger with Gael and Ignacio, playing a few more rounds, sometimes changing the game to seven-card stud. It was during one of these postscripts a few weeks before I left Chile that Gael asked me why I was returning to the States.

Is it family? he asked. Family always call before we are ready. Like the Grim Reaper.

After he made his observation, as if on cue for the convenience of his remark, Gael's wife called to him from the first floor. He smiled and shrugged before going up the stairs to see what she needed, leaving me alone with Ignacio.

Answering Gael but speaking to Ignacio, I said there were many things I had left unfinished at home, that I had hoped that time away from the daily

responsibilities of my former life would provide me a perspective they had not. My wife, whose need for time apart equaled my own but whose understanding was still more than I deserved, was now finished with the academic year, and she wanted me to come home so that we could leave it again, this time together, in hopes of undoing the damage that had been wrought. I realized as I said it that I did not believe we would succeed. I realized, too, only after I spoke the circumstances of my return to the States out loud, I had been avoiding saying and bringing into existence the truth that until then had been obscure and unexpressed, even to myself.

After a moment of silence during which his face remained immobile and his eyes fixed on the card table, Ignacio said, The people we remember are the ones whose story tells us something about ourselves.

I did not know why he told me that, or if that was his precise phrasing. But I am as certain of what he said next as I am the need to breathe.

He said, For a time when I was young, in another country, I worked for a shipping company. The night shift. I would arrive after most of the other workers had gone home and the parking lot was empty but still lit, sitting next to factories whose lots were also empty but still lit. All of them with the empty trailers of semi-tractors backed into loading docks.

The curious thing about the night shift is that you come to see the true everyday loneliness of the world around you. The kind of loneliness we take for granted because we all accept it as a fact of life. You look around at the idle endeavors of men and you understand that even in the middle of the

day, when the empty lots and trailers, the silent factories, are full with people and noise and things being produced and moved, it would still be the same. They are by nature empty shells, these buildings and trailers. Their usefulness is in what they are not, in their very emptiness, the manufacture and transportation of things to fill their emptiness. And the purpose of the people who work to fill them, day after day, just so that they may be emptied again, is no less empty. But when you go to the store to buy something, when you come into my shop, you expect the shelves to be filled by their efforts.

At first, he continued, I told myself that these people, from which I naturally excluded myself, drew their purpose and meaning from other places, other hours of their lives.

He stopped and took several slow breaths before saying, After many years of submitting myself daily to rationalization, to ignoring or excusing all manner of truths because I could not prevent the invasion of their hope, I became as desperate as a refugee. I realized how that no matter where we find meaning, even if we are lucky to have meaning, we cannot hold onto it. When we reach the end of a thought, we have another.

Ignacio washed the cards, spreading them on the table and moving them around randomly even though we were no longer playing and the night was clearly coming to an end, along with our acquaintance.

The shipping company was controlled by gangs, he continued. Greedy and ruthless. In my desperation, I believed the only way I could escape my situation was to steal from the company. I felt no guilt. How does one feel

guilty about stealing from a thief?

He then spoke again in a quieter voice. I did, however, he said, feel guilt over my affair with Catalina, who was the wife of my best friend. The last year of my time there were spent going to bed with her in the morning while her husband was gone, rising in the afternoon to go home and sleep a few hours before rising again at night to go to work.

Only after he had said this did Ignacio look up at me, adding, A terrible betrayal, absolutely.

If he expected me to say anything, he did not show it. Not that I was capable of response, so taken was I by his telling.

Ignacio gathered the cards neatly into a deck which he held tightly in his left hand. I told myself, he said, that by leaving I would give Catalina a chance to repair her marriage while never having to confront my friend, who I could no longer look in the face.

In my mind, he continued, it could be called almost honorable, though of course it was nothing of the sort, merely justification for further sins. It is clear that what I truly wanted was to avoid a cruel and inevitable end to what I had put in motion. It hardly bears saying that I failed in this. What I did succeed at was to steal a great deal of money, the proceeds of one criminal activity or another, the kind of money that does not get reported as missing but exacts its own revenge.

Ignacio placed the deck on the table, cut it, and left the two halves

sitting next to each other. The whose money it was came after me, he said then waited a moment before continuing. I fled without ever saying goodbye to Catalina. Without considering that my affair was known by many people, though not by my friend. The men I stole from made Catalina responsible. My friend became a widower and went mad with grief and anger, while I mostly escaped, he said and traced the scar with the back of his thumb, looking me directly in the eye as he did.

On some level, my American cynicism questioned the truth of his story and I suspected he was making up these details even as I knew that no one, not even my wife or friends, not strangers I'd met in airports or any of the lovers throughout my life, had ever spoken to me so plainly and honestly. I also knew that in telling Ignacio my story, I had drawn him into it, just as he had drawn me into his, and that the risk of disbelief was not the point. In any case, Ignacio's story, or at least the shape of it, was my own.

Afterward, he said with something approaching a sigh, I came to Santiago and lost myself by changing my name and using the money to open my store, neither of which has solved the problem of all of this.

He made a gesture that took in the whole of the basement but which I knew referred to the world outside and the unresolved nature of his asylum, or possibly to life in general. Having finished, he stood from his chair.

He said, I am telling you this because people in our situation learn to recognize each other. You are also a refugee of sorts, and you are seeking to avoid your return home because home no longer exists as you knew it, as it

did before you fled. When we stay in a place, or with someone, whatever changes happen, happen to us as well. But when we leave, the changes we experience are our own, whether we leave a country by boarding a plane or leave ourselves by sleeping with our friend's wife.

Then he held out his hand and, after I had stood and taken it, said, If you find yourself in Santiago in the future, alone or with someone, you will come to the intersection where we will feed the pigeons together. We can play cards, or perhaps discuss fate while we wait for the cannon's reminder that, for better or worse, we have lived another day.

After he left, I stood, unable to move for several minutes until Gael came down the stairs to see that I was alright. He offered me a bite of food and a final drink that I refused before walking home through the dark streets of Bellavista.

Some months later, I thought again of the emptiness of warehouse parking lots late at night, of Ignacio and his implacable face and the undercurrent of terror that flows beneath our lives.

It was Thanksgiving and we were driving from our home to my wife's mother's house three hours away. I was in the passenger seat, watching the fields of winter wheat and cows at pasture sliding by. My wife had just said that we didn't love each other anymore.

She didn't say, I don't love you anymore. Or, You don't love me anymore. She said, We don't love each other anymore. And I couldn't argue.

Just as happened when I met Gael and when I told Ignacio my story,

the words were new to me because they expressed what I had been seeking to keep unspoken, and I had the same sense of shock, of being shaken out of my thoughts as when I would sometimes forget the cannon atop Cerro Santa Lucia and be frightened by its booming truth, and I was inevitably taken back to my days in Chile and my encounter with Ignacio and the feeling of certainty I had then, knowing as only the most prescient of us do, that we are all bound, sooner or later, to confront what we most hope to avoid.

Jason Hill holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and an MA in Philosophy from the University of Connecticut. His fictions have appeared in *The Bangalore Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *The Stonecoast Review*, and *Tulane Review* among others. He is a Pushcart nominee and was a finalist for the 2018 William van Dyke Prize and the 2019 Larry Brown Short Story Award. He has lived in Providence, Boston, Jersey City, and Louisville. His current whereabouts are unknown.

The Art of Ann-Marie Brown

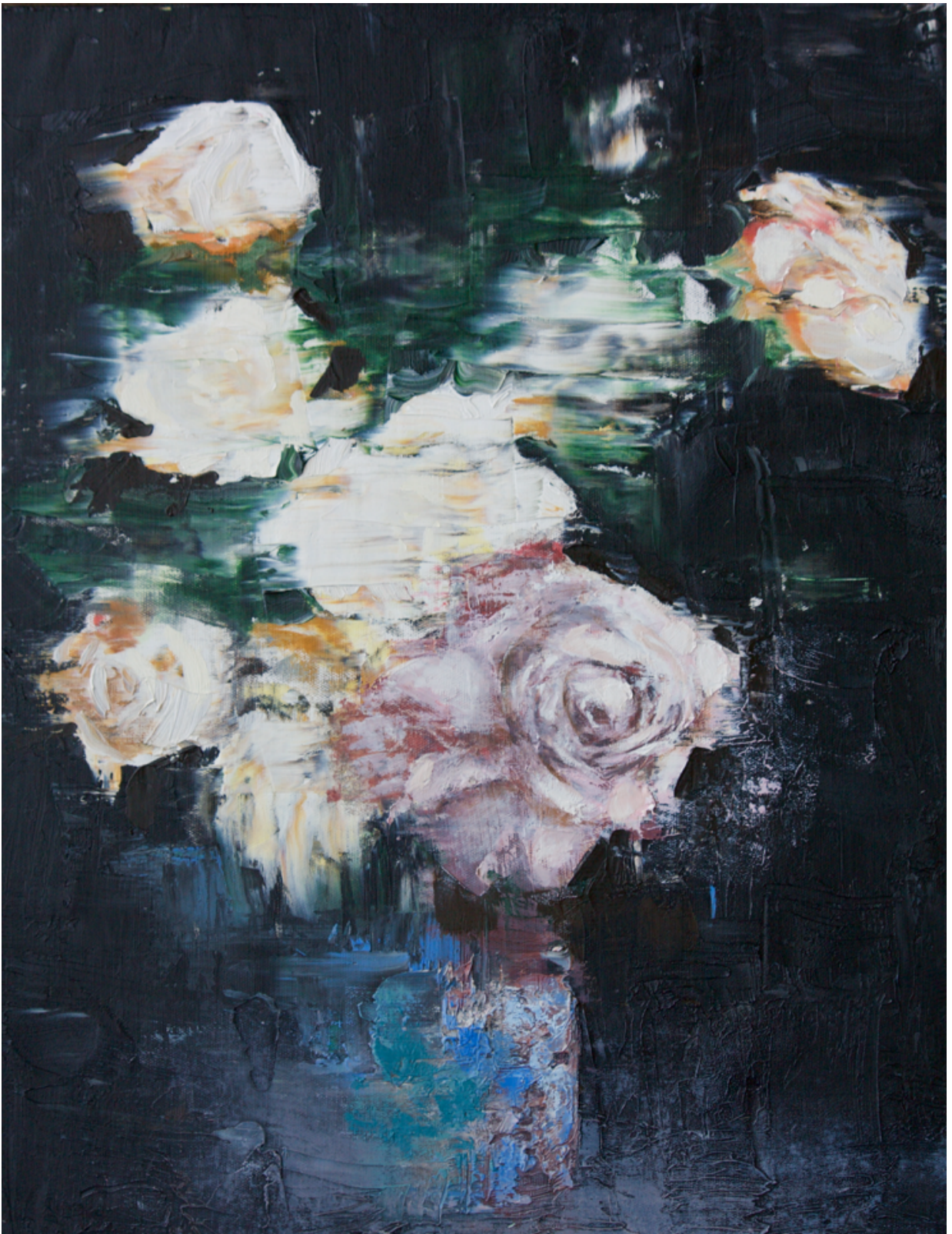
Interview and Gallery

A couple of years ago I moved to Helsinki for an extended residency. My son was enrolled in a public school for that year and one day came home shaken. The entrance hall at his Finnish school had a memorial wall for the soldiers who died in WW2 just like the memorial wall at his school in Montreal. The two schools were commemorating soldiers on opposite sides of the conflict, and stepping back in time, his Montreal friends could've been fighting his Finnish friends. That conversation was the seed for my series war dance, a meditation on conflict. The still lifes on the front and back covers of Silver Rose were painted as part of that series.

Flowers for the Reds is a bouquet for the losers, each rose a life cut down too soon. The bud in the top right blurred, like a child who can't sit still for a photo. The vase itself alludes to graves. The Victory Bouquet contains a screaming skull, because the price of Victory is to be haunted by the ghosts of the war dead on both sides.



Flowers for the Reds



A Victory Bouquet

Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from? What is your artistic background? What are three fun facts about you?

I was born in England and have been a wanderer since I was in my teens. I studied at a seminary after High School and following a crisis of faith, switched to doing an art degree at University.

Fun facts: a. At the age of 18 I hitchhiked across Israel and Egypt, sleeping in hostels and under the stars.

b. When my son was a baby we lived with a wolf, he learned to walk by hanging on to the ruff of fur under the wolf's neck

c. I just finished Bell Hook's All About Love & think that everyone should read it.

Why do you create art? Do you find yourself drawn to certain themes? Or, perhaps, to certain societal, political, social, or philosophical issues? Furthermore, what inspires you to create art the most?

I create art because I think in images and want to share them. I'm not drawn to certain themes--All of my works are born out of engagement with the world in the moment. Themes arise (I've had exhibitions exploring climate change, the gender spectrum, gentrification etc)and bodies of work have cohesion, but I don't begin by wanting to ... prove a point.

What inspires me to create art is that it's possible to create art.

Tell us about your current artistic projects. What are you working on?

During Covid I built a studio on a property on the west coast of B.C. It's between the forest and the ocean and animals (bears, coyotes, deer) sometimes wander past the windows while I'm working. With all that's going on in the world right now I'm thinking about them--how humans are dragging these creatures who know how to live in harmony with the environment, along for our ride. I have three paintings in progress right now exploring this.

Who are your favorite artists and why?

Too many to mention--but a short list would include Emily Carr for her paintings that feel like prayers.

Velazquez because he breathed life into his images. Rembrandt for his use of light and shadow. Kathe Kollwitz for her emotional intensity.



SILVER ROSE
MAGAZINE

