

The **SHEAF** Magazine

2019-2020



**Union
County
College**

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The Sheaf Magazine

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Jeremy Fiorindo

Tegmine

Ten light-minutes from this celestial figure
terraformed; colonizers razing Olympus Mons.
The horizon. Mars still rages at the sun,
bright star in control, hands finding constellations
in my skin. Every touch burns away the surface.
Someday I will collapse in a singular moment.
The moon moves on.

Myra Dukes

Café Bonhomme

In Café Bonhomme
life is devoured
until we reach emptiness and fullness at once.

We wait for the day to ferment
and our bodies to feel the weight of hours
that we have consumed.

The aperitif comes,
the first liquid of countless more
that will energize our frames and inflame
our thoughts until all we are is laughter.

Exotic conversation accompanied with
peanut shells,
pits of olives,
and empty glasses.

These are the ingredients of our nights.

“
Life is
devoured
”

At 54

He ties his oxfords on the same side
of the bed
every night.

Norma Caballero



Kyanna Nusom

I Chose This Way

I chose to be this way.
I woke up
and decided to be gay.
I mean what
would people really
say?
They could call me
a faggot,
say that I'm
an abomination
or that I have mental
illness,
but I chose this way.
Why wouldn't I choose
to be gay?
It's really fun
being kicked out
of homes,
being kicked to the
street.

I might end up dying
because of who I want to be with at the end of the night.
Thoughts go through my head
that I am what's wrong with the world.
I did not CHOOSE to be this way.
I wake up and try my hardest to pray the gay away,
but all I can do is embrace the pain and be proud to be gay.

Kennith Washington



Make America Great Again

America,
Land of the Free,
Home of the Brave!
But out of fear
I'll shoot you, if, when I ask,
you reach too quickly
for your license and registration.
Wrongfully, you may get locked
up because you look different, and
your hair curls tighter than mine.
You may die walking home
with a hoodie on
because your skin isn't lighter
than mine.
I'll find a way to justify it
for the sake of saving face.
Because when you think about it.
"Black people always try
to make it about race!"
"There's no such thing
as white privilege!"
Never mind the slave trade across
the Atlantic,
Screams of a fear and anger.
Women and children were frantic!
Forget the tiptoeing smells
of death, the stench of vomit, feces,
and sea water.

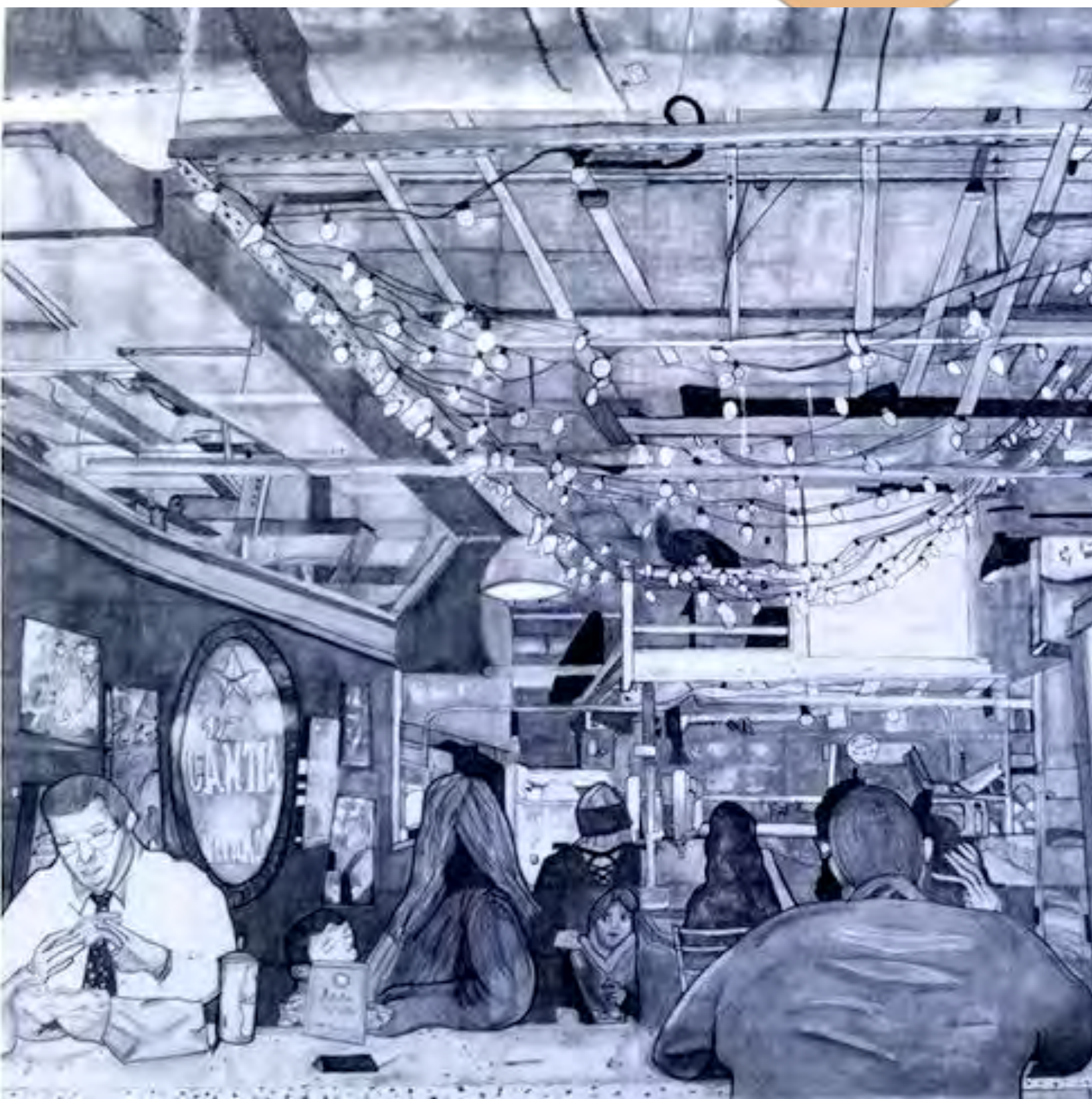
Don't think about the men who raped
mothers and daughters!
Oh, well they were just "business transac-
tions."
So how come when it comes
to BLACK ME, my offenses
are unforgivable infractions?
Black, so do I appear weaker, poorer,
less valuable to you?
Do I fight back?
Should I run? Should I hide?
Or end up possibly with a rope tied.....
If I speak up, will I hang from a tree,
or be flashed a badge and then slain
in the street?
Don't worry!
We are making America
Great Again!

Irene Taggart





Kyanna Nusom



The Graduate



Katherine Solis

It was nothing like I imagined
it would be.

2020 was to be euphoric,
now this massacre came
to destroy it.

I want my destiny back,
the long nights, tears

I fought back,

we need proof of that.

I waited this long
with great anticipation,

I pray the lord
gives me my graduation.

I am obsessed.

The graduation is now
an infatuation—
those smiles and cheers,
my family near.

Yet this small but large
thing broke it, the threat
evoked it.

The satisfaction
of my accomplishments,
the recognition
of my achievements,
the reflection of the struggle
to get me here, but now
the finish line is finally near.

I just want to walk across
the stage, watch my family
look amazed.

I pray for all
who have been affected, yet
I stick my chest out proud.

The man above
has blessed me.

Please take me back to 2019,
so we can right the wrongs
for we are just human beings.

Shaquasia Thompson



Undecided

Dancing in the rain, not sure where to go.
I'll forge a road that no one knows.
I'm poised on my toes, on the verge
of leaping, performing a classic routine
with accuracy
and symmetry.

The gray clouds will say *More gloomy days*,
so I'll keep tip toeing between lightning strikes.
I can get up and walk off anything,
even a broken leg,
fear in my skin.

I jump in unprepared,
come back, with clean bruises and fading scars
because what doesn't kill you
makes you more resilient.
Tears will fall, and fear will whisper,
but even in embers, there's a little light.
Tip, tap, tippity, tap,
I never want to miss a beat.
I watch how every raindrop
drips watercolors on my feet.

One single drop, one splash, and one spark—
will it be Liberal Studies, Liberal Arts,
or something in-between?
To answer your question,
I'm still not sure,
but this me!

Imiekame Longe



The sound of the ocean
fills the space.
The people are in great turmoil.
The government dictates their lives,
rationing food
and corrupting the minds
of the young.
Head over to the tourist spots.
No turmoil is seen here,
but little do the tourists know
only few towns are in tip-top shape,
making money off of travelers,
money that goes straight
to the government.
But this is home.
With culture on the streets,
the smell of garlic lingers in the air.
Little do they know
Cubans are warriors
divided by their nation.
Music unites them,
Salsa fills their hearts,
keeps their feet tapping away,
brings the country together
with love for all.

Emma Munoz

“Mi Tierra” (My Land)

The ruins of the old architecture,
old cars, broken windows,
the beauty is now
in great turmoil.
Sun beams on your skin,
the humid air frizzes your hair.

Treasury

The United States of America finally sheds the colors from its flag.

Decisions are made in restaurants where you can see
butchers dissecting the pigs.

You'd be stupid enough to turn down a dinner like this, they say.

The first responders who jump the gun when something
isn't properly done, how structured they demand it all to be.

Your life no longer belongs to you. This is a real estate position
that you signed up for.

Do you like your real estate?

The last time I checked, your name don't ring any bells around here, pal.

When was the last time you got your heart ripped out of your chest?

Both hot and cold it is out here in the South, my friend!

This Texas smoking gun will enter your mind
when you enter this land, day or night.

Looking back, you are the ultimate cosigner.

You knew what you signed up for here.

Now I go back and forth with these high contractors—to think
that something might change!

But it won't. This will always be
business as usual for the both of us.

Nicolette Mendoza



The Kids Are Gonna' Be Alright

Mama, please don't cry.
Years of tears are age your ageless eyes.
I'm sorry that you never got the love you deserve,
but you raised young man who will always love
you first.

Mama, I know you never had the support you
needed.
I remember the days of sitting next to you in
church. You were kneeling
with your hands folded to your mouth,
praying to God to help you and your babies out.

Mama, you've always done the best you can
raising a young lady and a boy to be a man.
I still have visions of us in desperate times.
Even then, you promised us kids were gonna' be
alright

You never missed a day of work.
Those hours equaled a paid bill.
The fridge wasn't always full,
but us kids never missed a meal.

My sweet sixteen wasn't a big party, celebration, or
fuss,
but, Mama you got me that black velour *Juicy
Couture* purse I eyed for months.
Mama, don't apologize for the things you couldn't
do.
Those things shouldn't have been on you.

Always scolded on what you did wrong,
never applauded for what you did right.
It's no thing, Mama,
'Cause the kids are gonna be alright.

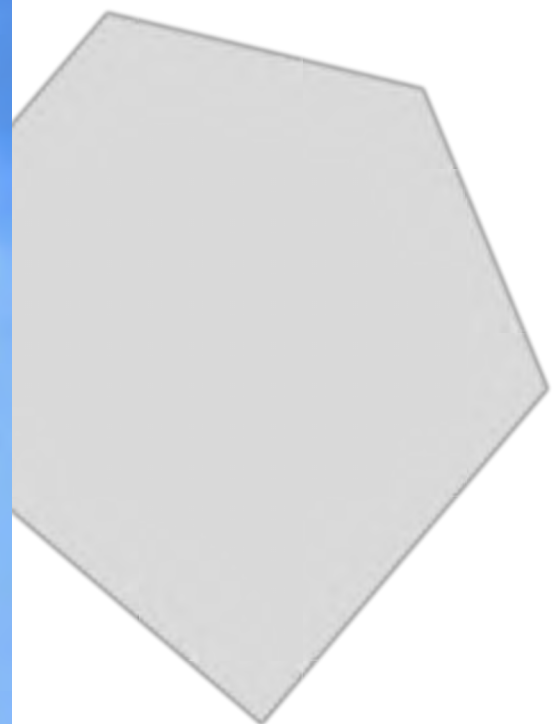


Samantha Jezowicz

Now, Mama you're getting older.
I wish you every happiness.
If life denies you that, just know this—
please cry no more tears, no more sorries or re-
grets.
You did what you could,
even better than your best.

A girl to gracious young woman I have become,
a boy to respectable man became your son.
Mama, close your eyes.
Sleep well at night.
You did it, its okay.
The kids are gonna' be
alright.

Breana Brazell



Loner Owner

The sun shines bright outside the window covering the living room with a golden cloak. Everything around me is filled with the light of the early day. As always, I run to my owner's room with my tail waving to the new day, to wake up my human with thousands of wet kisses along her face.

My owner is the most special person in my world. She always gives me sweet little treats. My favorite ones are the blueberry cookies when I do my biological needs outside in the brownish green grass of our backyard.

My human gives me a last cuddle, and then she gets out of bed. I happily follow her, feeling grateful for being reunited after the long lonely night full of dark nightmares and sweet dreams replete with tennis balls.

My human is small, and at the same time, big. Her reddish sunset hair is sprinkled with gray streaks, and her face, bathed in freckles, is full of wrinkles. My favorite aspect of my owner is her two big, echoing eyes. They are green, gray, brown, blue and all the colors of the rainy rainbow. They're two prismatic kaleidoscopes of light.

Before the disappearance of the little human, every morning, my owner and I religiously use to go to the dog-park across

the street, where the everlasting feeling of freedom would take me over. Now, she doesn't leave the four walls of our small prison, and her face is constantly in a sad grimace. I don't see her bright white perfect pearls anymore.

As soon as she gets out of the bathroom, she turn the television on and starts to make our meals. The voice of the news anchor fills the room with a constant reverberation that seems to be calming for my owner.

The big man, I don't like him because he always smells of alcohol. He gets out of their room and comes to the kitchen to ingest the greasy food. Even though I don't like the big man, I go sit next to him because he always gives me some of his food. He is so entranced by the bitter bottles of beer in front of his face that he barely touches the plate of succulent food.

The big man has a few qualities that make him big. His slender body is tall, and his belly is prominent. His hands, that lately are always holding a bottle of alcohol, preferably beer, are long and delicate but strong. His skin that has an oddly yellowish color is full of craters of repugnant blisters. My favorite part of him is his humongous big bald head that looks like a huge ball.

His fatty hand comes down with a smelly, smoky piece of bacon, and I pull it gently from his fingers. The bacon is crunchy and tasty, not like the littles aliments my owner gives to eat. I like human food much more than my actual aliment, but my owner doesn't seem to understand my preferences.



Jeremy Fiorindo

After the big man leaves the house, my owner goes to wake up the ancient woman. She's as grayish as a person can be, with a grey nest for hair and skin the color of papyrus. I call her the mummy. Her whole body is skinny and bony, and she has trouble keeping herself together. Usually, she is quite aggressive, and on her dark days, she hits me with her cane. She calls me bad names and yells at me, but I do a pretty good job ignoring her. Also, sometimes, I pee in her room, filling the space with a rancid, poignant smell that my owner thinks comes from the mummy.

Once the old woman is set up in the front of the TV and has been fed, the three of us sit watching the silly box. That's what we will mostly do during the whole day.

Before the little human disappeared, when the gray lady wasn't living with us, my owner used to leave the house to go to fulfill her self-actualization needs in her workplace. I would be left alone by myself most of the day waiting for her return. Those were good times. I much prefer the time in which I was invaded by the isolation of my own thoughts than by the beatings of the old hag and the continuous vexations of the big man against my owner.

The ancient woman yells something at the guy on the television, and I go to cuddle with my owner. My favorite spot is her lap. She instinctively scratches behind my ears. It still amazes me how that plain dark machine box that comes to life in a period of seconds is always full of multiple vivid vibrant images.

My owner spends her time seated in front of the television until the late hours of the night. My theory is she doesn't want to be left alone in her bedroom with the man. I do not blame her. The big man is always cruel to her, and practically every time they have a discussion, she ends up with purple bruises all over her body. They are a lugubrious panorama, like a dark, sinister sonnet of the pain inflicted by the fists of the big man.

I think we all miss the little human, and that's how we cope with it. Now, the man's best friend is freezing sharp bottle of the beer. My owner doesn't leave the house anymore, and she spends her days getting old and withered in front of the television. I, myself, when no one pays attention to me,

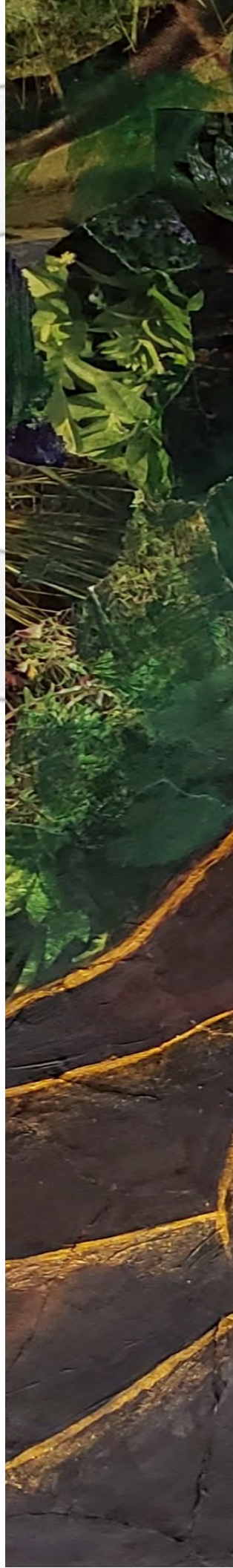
secretly enter the sacred room of the little human. Everything is the same as it was before, but I know that once I leave this holy inviolate refuge, the chaos of our household will come back to haunt me. The mummy and her beating will still be there, together with the chastisement of the big man and the disconsolate sadness of my loner owner.

Rosa Pelaez Vinuela

Spring's Arrival

When spring arrives, the songbirds
flit and flutter to a special tune.
The squirrels yawn and stretch and mutter
amongst themselves, free of winter blues.
The soil soaks up the last droplets of snow
like a sponge, and the deer
get sticky hooves as they tread
and tromp through the thickened mud.
The sun shines softly, winter flees
and leaves no trace,
as spring has sprung again
to take its place.

Justyna Matlosz





Uncleanable Dirty Hands

The storm was in my grandmother's house. Her husband was in the house with me, and I was 8 years old. My body was broken by dirty hands and emotions broke through my heart. The dirty hands were saved in my body and brain, and I remember every single touch every time I think about or hear about rape or abuse. My loneliness and isolation became my most powerful tool as a survivor.

During my childhood, I went to visit my grandmother from my mother's side; her name was Juana Tejada. She has a different husband at the moment, but her husband then became all my memories of dirty hands. He began to be charge of me very often. The unforgettable day was when he finished showering. He was wearing a towel covering half his body.

The farmhouse had a bathroom separated form the house, the kitchen on the left side, a living room and bedroom on the right, and two doors to every room of the house. After he finished the shower, he was standing up in the bedroom in front of the bed. He used a soft voice and called "Mariel, Mariel, Mariel come here."

The house was made of aluminum, so it was easy to hear between walls. When I arrived, he seated me on his legs. He held me until I couldn't move, and put his

tongue in my mouth. He repeated to me two times, " You better be quiet and don't make a sound."

I broke into tears, and he started to touch my little body intimately until I got terrified. I pushed with all my strength and said, "Let me go!"

He laughed at me and became more aggressive. He covered my mouth until I couldn't breathe. My legs started to shake, then my hands started to shake. He said be silent and nothing painful would happen to me. I was lost in confusion.

While he was in the process of breaking me down and destroying me at the age of 8, someone had been knocking on the door. My grandmother had arrived. I was so lucky that she arrived. Somehow the door opened, and I ran until my house was very far away. I remember running for a long time. I was crying for days, and I could not explain what happened, could not clarify the words.

Then my father couldn't handle the tears anymore and spent the entire night pulling the words from me, building the story phrase by phrase from my poor, tearful vocabulary.

We had stayed up all night. When the sun came out he said, "Mariel, stay here. You are not going to school today. Go to sleep."

When he was leaving the room, I



opened my bedroom door, moved very quietly, trying to see what my father was about to do. I was shaking so much that I couldn't control my hands. I saw my dad unlocking his closet door, getting the gun out, and filling it with bullets.

My Mother jumped over me. She started to scream. She shut the door. I did not understand what was happening, and she took the gun from him. My father ran out of the bedroom, went to his car, and left. As soon as he saw me again he was breaking down in tears. The uncleanable dirty hands are unforgettable until today.

Marina Romero



Arshy Hernandez

argianil

Paper Plane

There once was a paper plane
that flew in the air.
It had words,
but no one cared.
It flew
and flew for days,
waited to blow away.
Waiting for that day to come,
its transformation had just begun.
It fell to the ground, was trampled
and lost its shape.
It became comfortable.
with being out of place.
Crumpled
and left aside,
sewers and gutters
became the place to hide.

Jashar Banks

“ It became
comfortable
with being out
of place. ”



Ocean

The waves may be high
while the tide remains low,
Too close to the offing,
and the current won't let go.
Billows cloud your judgment,
acceptance with brine,
for it's better than nothing.
Despite the light from the sun,
The deepest part is seen by none.

Jashar Banks



Jessica Perez

The Performer

As the performer takes their place upon the stage,
they brace themselves to entertain the throng
that gazes upon them.

The performer portrays their emotions to the
audience that lies before them.

The performer strives to astonish the audience
with skill and perfection,

to show their audience the deft gift they have
in the realm of entertainment.

As the lights shine down on them, they are
standing in the vastness and open for many
eyes to admire.

The audience yearns for more.

Thus the love for both the performer and the
audience begins.

The performer's career begins and expands as
time grinds on.

The admirers keep the performer alive.

The performer wanders around seeking more
stages, more recognition.

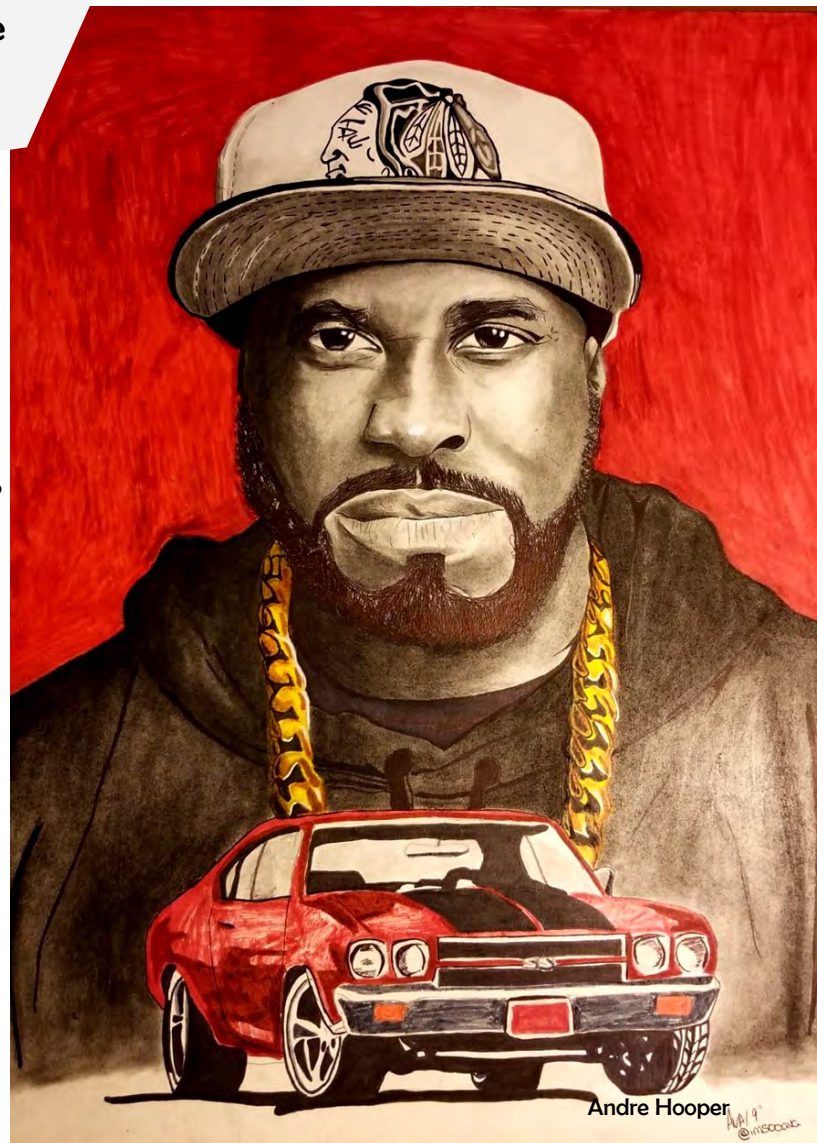
The word spreads rapidly from the mouths of
admirers.

Thus the performer's name is spoken by lips
all around.

And thus till the performer dies, their tal-
ent continues to expand,
and when the performer dies their legacy
lives on,

and all of their admirers remember and
continue to admire the performer.

Joe Charlie



The Page Left Unturned

One page a day was what I read.

As the words filled up a page, I silently
sounded out the words

until there were none. No more words left
to come out.

No more air left to breathe.

As I gazed on the page, my eyes filled with
tears,

Life for me as I knew it was done. Here I
lay in this bed,

words from prior stories stuck in my head.

My internal light shinning so brightly, my
heart slowly pounding.

One beat at a time was what I felt.

The vibrations no longer in my heart,

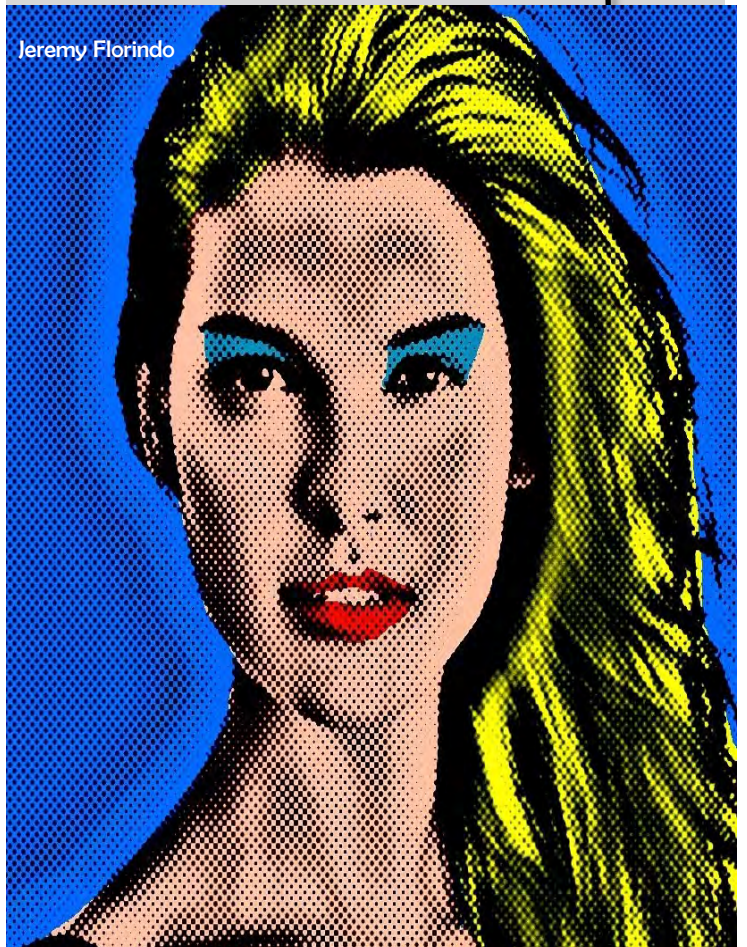
one beat was what I felt. One page a day
was what I read,

and still those words remain in my head.

Shaquasia Thompson

“
No more air
left to
breathe”

Jeremy Florindo







Clouds

Sometimes I'm convinced that the roof on my home is actually a dreadful cloud that fools me into believing it is a safe space like I'm told. My windows... I can feel the warmth of the sun and clear blue skies that are like glimpses of better things and fairytales, but then I'm enclosed by a dark cloud that rains negativity on my peace, or happiness or collectedness. This could disguise itself as a safe haven, a sense of belongingness. Sometimes that facade works. It fools my mind into believing that although not perfect, the walls of my home are okay. Just as I start to pay less attention to the cloud and focus on the sun or the odd shapes of what I used to think of as soft, white cotton candy in the sky, it rains. My pure cotton candy clouds melt because of the rain and now the gloominess of the gray cloud consumes my sky. It rains and it storms and it quakes. It pours.

And I don't feel safe anymore. I don't feel protected because that cloud is occupying my home, the only place that I have the right to feel safe in. I don't only live with the cloud. I live with that cloud that creates the rumble of storms, which I naively believed were angels bowling when I was younger, waves that crash hard like during hurricanes. Disaster. What it leaves—debris. Masses of messes full of fury and frustration. Then it leaves me. It leaves me one who now jumps at the honk of a car horn, or at the little click a door makes when its been fully closed. One who shudders and curses at the sight of a light gray sky. One who develops a keen sense for the whistle of the calm winds. One who stares at the sun until her eyes fill with tears from the blinding rays. Then it leaves me.

Breanna Brazil

The Great Opening

I'll always remember the chill of the hospital, but arguably the thick insulated blankets were the best part of my stay. Sometimes I slept for what felt like days while other nights it felt as if I only blinked. Hands clad in gloves would prod me awake, checking my vitals, or the tight suction of the blood pressure cuff would serve as a buffer. There was so much chatter, and it made me wonder if the nurses even cared for the patients attempting to rest just paces away. Other times I'd lie awake and alone with nothing to serve as a distraction but my thoughts.

I wasn't in pain. The gossipy nurses made sure the jaw breakers that served as medications were forcibly swallowed. Another pain was just under the surface, one that wounded me more than any physical affliction I had ever felt. It was the core of my thoughts that had planted itself in my skull ages ago, and yet I could remember a day when the roots weren't yet watered.

I had lost my sight seven years ago at that point, but the fear of the world was still fresh in my veins. How could I navigate the world as someone who couldn't see? I wasn't like those other blind people; I mean, they had guts, a fury that I didn't possess or didn't have the will to invest in. I wasn't meant to be blind; something would drag me

out of this nightmare, it had to, but nothing did.

I had been spoiled for years, but still, I didn't think I had a sense of entitlement. I didn't believe I deserved special treatment. I was in utter denial. As humans we tend to have a thought process of, "It could never be me." We don't realize how vulnerable we are until tragedy strikes, and the question of everyone's existence is asked, "Why me?"

As a 13-year old girl, I was thrilled at the thought of glasses. I never would have imagined what I assumed would be a normal eye exam turning into a scene from *Degrassi*. I can't forget the whirl of nerves in my stomach or the anxious tick in my thigh once I realized I couldn't make out anything the doctor was showing me.

"Would you stop tapping on your phone?" The sharp remark jolted me: I hadn't noticed the racket I was causing along the screen of the phone.

“

How could I
navigate the world
as someone who
couldn't see?

”

The man finally spared a look into my eyes and realized something wasn't right. After that, hours flew by in a blur. I remember rushing down the sidewalk; Everything was dark and cold and my mom was walking in quick stride beside me. The look of unbridled fear carved into her face sent my heart sinking. She was holding something back from me, but my questions would be answered. After meeting with a specialist, I knew my fate, but I still didn't realize how much my life would change.

I was aware my Dad had VHL, but the thought of it effecting me was never a whisper of a doubt. A growth of tumors that could remain benign for years on end become malignant at any moment. For a long time, my mother blamed herself because she said she should have known better, she should have gotten me checked. My dad, hours away in Florida, put the blame on himself because I never would have contracted the disease if it weren't for him. I, however, didn't have anyone to blame because it wasn't anyone's fault.

Before my eye doctor, who would perform all my surgeries to come, would even place me on an operating table, he pushed me to have every part of my body examined. Ultrasounds, CAT scans, and MRIs followed in succession, and after every test something knew was found. All tumors were benign, but even with that heavenly piece of information, it was still so much to process. Thinking of all of the exams to come, because that certainly wouldn't be the last time I was ever inside of an MRI or CAT scan, was exhausting, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I had gone 13 years blissfully ignorant, but I didn't want any more sneak attacks.

I was afraid of what my life became. Before I touched a cane, I was glued to my mother's arm, trusting her to guide me wherever. I hated the stares I knew we received—the stares I received. Whenever I stumbled, tripped or apologized to a pole for bumping into it, a stone of humiliation would sit in the pit of my stomach. People found it hard to communicate with me; speaking to the people around me seemed easier and I let them. I didn't speak up for myself, not when they called me "she" and never when they asked my aide if I could do the class work in high school.

High school might as well have sprouted a cloud of doom and gloom over the building. I dreaded walking down the halls with my cane that screamed, "Hey, I'm blind!"

I'd cry to my mom, telling her how much I hated the way so many people treat me.

"Screw them, Tiana," she would say, "You can't be so shy, let them know you are."

As much as I wanted to do as Mami said, I didn't have the courage. I wished I was like her, strong-willed with a non-nonsense attitude, but I was the pitiful antithesis. I cowered under the public eye, praying and hoping for an alternative that wasn't in my destiny.

Isolation was my only solace but had also become the destruction of my mental health. I was lost for years and terrified about where my future was headed. What was even worse was that I felt powerless to sculpt it.

I was embarrassed to admit I wasn't working, going to school, or active in any way. My friends, cousins, and so many people my age were out and about, succeeding in school, accomplishing things in their workplace, and actually living.

The darkest place I reached by far were the days I'd squeeze my eyes shut until sleep freed me from my warring thoughts. Then, when I woke up, I was still blind. I wasn't a shell of my former self because I could still feel everything, so much so that I wished I could not longer feel and yearned for a day I wouldn't care anymore.

It was mid-August, and one of my annual MRIs was due. No matter how many times I prepared myself for these appointments, I could never combat the nerves eating away at me. That day was different, though. Mami was on edge. The atmosphere was thick, and the longer we waited the more the sense of foreboding weighed my chest down. A nurse finally walked in, and even though I couldn't see the motion, I knew Mami jerked in her seat.

"Come with me, the doctor wants to speak with you." The tone of the nurse's voice was undetectable. I couldn't tell if it was soothing or sympathetic.

To be honest, I don't remember much of our conversation with the doctor. There were greetings, explanations and tears. I always knew brain surgery was a possibility, though I never anticipated it would happen so soon. Fear like I never felt before consumed me and I screamed. I screamed until my throat was raw, and the only thing

that stopped me was my mother's embrace. We were outside. I didn't remember walking outside, but the world might as well have disappeared around me for all I knew.

There was only my mother and me in that moment. My muffled sobs in her chest and her vice grip around my body.

"I'm so sorry baby," she whispered brokenly, like a mantra.

What more could I possibly endure? hadn't the worst already occurred? Little did I know that my brain surgery would be the greatest opening of my life. Not because of the act of surgery itself, but a barrier enclosing a part of my mind I never knew I possessed would crumble.

Maybe it was the isolation or the overwhelming silence that would envelop the ICU. Maybe it was all that I had gone through up until that very moment. There I was with 20 something staples in my head, and a throw-up bin and arm's length away, when my internal musings shifted. One thought rang clear, sending a flood of tears to my eyes.

I was wasting so much time. A million different outcomes could have sprung from this surgery, but I was alive. Was I, though? Or was I simply surviving day to day, waiting for a miracle? But this isn't the way life plays out. I prayed for a change, but I was asking for the wrong thing.

I wanted to change a disability I had no control of. I asked God to fix it because I couldn't handle this new reality that had become my life.

But I wasn't broken. What I needed to ask for was strength and worth. The more I said, "I can't," the more I wouldn't. Then another harsh reality struck me, morbid but the stone cold truth: If I were to die, I would never know the scope of my dormant potential.

The issue wasn't my lost sight; it was me. I was holding myself back, and if I didn't

my perception, I would never find the happiness I dreamed of. I breathed determination and was driven by a self-worth I would work hard to replenish. It was what I deserved after leading such a miserable, hopeless life.

Once I was healed, it would only be months later until I was back in the ICU, but I had a plan. It was torture, fighting through



Marina Romero

the recovery, but it was all worth it the end. Something I had never felt in my life burned in my heart. I felt it that night In the ICU, and I still feel it humming in my veins now.

Determination.

For years, my mom had tried to convince me to go back to school, but I just couldn't. I was terrified to repeating the trauma I experienced in high school, but I had to make a change. I needed to force myself to join the outside world because the isolation I bounded myself in was tearing me apart.

There was no such thing as waiting for a change—I had to move. I had to sculpt my future with my own hands. Using my cane was my first step. And even to this day I'm not completely comfortable with it, but the burden of using it has lessened.

I'm teaching myself it's okay if my cane bangs against a door. It's okay that I need stay glued to a wall to keep myself grounded. It's okay if I bump into someone or something. It's okay to ask for help. It's okay that I'm blind.

I knew school would be the best thing for me. It would teach me independence and commitment that up until this point I had no experience of. Losing my sight stole my will to live a proper life. My brain surgery seemed to follow the trend of my downward spiral, but I no longer view it that way. It most definitely wasn't the greatest moment of my life; the entire ordeal was exhausting.

Sometimes I wonder if I had never needed brain surgery would I have had the

had brain surgery, would I have had the realization that drove me forward. If brain surgery wasn't the moment of my rude awakening, then what would it have been? What else would have broken the hazy perception I wore like a second skin?

I suppose it wasn't a matter of "if" because what happened, happened. My experience getting brain surgery changed my life in ways I could probably never accurately explain. I am a different person now, one filled with so much of the hope and strength I prayed for in my lowest moments. I like to call it The Great Opening. My shell cracked, and the more I push, the more light escapes.

Tiana Martinez



Why, Mama?

When I tell you to, sit down;
cross your legs at you ankles not at your
knees.

You ain't grown.

Why, mama?

Don't sit on a man's lap, even if he's your
daddy.

You ain't grown!

Why, mama?

Brush your hair every night. Make sure you
wash up right,

and you're not allowed to wear anything
too tight!

Hands off your hips;

walk like a lady!

And honey, you better not switch!

No, you can't sleep over at Emily's house.

Why, mama?

Just because I know her mother,
doesn't mean I know who stays at her house!

Mama, Emily walks different now.
She barely even comes around,
and when I speak to her, her eyes look dead.
Her head is always down.

Irene Taggart

Tropical Dream

A slight breeze in the air

A cool shade under the towering palm trees

Sipping on syrupy, crisp coconut juice

A breath of peace and marveling

Blue vaulted heavens, white, wispy
feathery clouds

A smell of petrichor in the air,
coarse and grainy

silky and smooth all at the same time

A darkened floor with damp patches

Sinking toes in the sand

Smoldering yet pleasant

Scorching yet pleasant

A glance at the blue landscape—
raging waves and tidal forces

A beautiful bronze, dawn where the sun
becomes protagonist

Daydreaming—the galore of the water,
salty foam, sandy coast

Where the ocean sets the soul free

Where the tropic becomes a dream

Nathaly Lopez

Dear Addiction

You don't know me but I know you quite well
You stole my mother from me, putting her family
through hell
Providing a good time, at temporary relief
to escape from the pain, the abuse and the grief
You are the treacherous, manipulative, an
intricate little thing
Provided just enough, made her believe she
could do anything
Through a euphoric glaze, happiness danced
through her mind
Like a thief in the night, you crept up from be-
hind
She came crashing and gained the monster she
had become
It started with spontaneous store runs in the
middle of the night
To avoid explaining where and why, she would
start random fights
She couldn't always afford you, but she managed
to find a way
Slowly our home became more empty, family
heirlooms became the pay
Striped of all her dignity, her morals and her
pride
You stole her soul, her identity, leaving her feel-
ings dead inside
I tried to be patient and show that I'd love her
anyway
But you were too quick. The beast you are can't
be tamed

Constant lies of going to rehab, "I'm clean and
want to come home"
to find her two days later, slumped and mum-
bling off that little white stone
You did teach me one thing, for this I will say
thank you:
a vow to my children to never repeat what you
put me through
I have come to hate you. You're master of evil
kind
You stole my mother, her soul, body and mind
I love her regardless, I set this hatred free
I know you, addiction, but you will never know
me.

Jeannette McMullen



Daniela Arrieta

Coronavirus! Oh, Lord

It was like a disaster, a storm
stealthy and deadly.
The forecast was imminent.
We endured a trial of emotion.
We are at high-risk
of feeling vulnerable.
No one could predict if we should evacuate.
Evacuation of my mind makes time extinct.
The signs were everywhere.
But now the terror of these images,
what should we do? Run for it!
Today I'm okay.
But tomorrow I might need to buy a gun.
I used to imagine if the world ended,
he would be with me to help me run,
but he is gone,
Long gone.
By the way,
when he left,
that was the end of the world,
so what we experience now,
I've already gone through it.

Shaniquah Spinks

“
We are
at high
risk
”



Maria Robles

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