



Riverrun



A collection of literary and artistic works by members of
The Academy community

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Chaos

I believe in sleepless nights on city streets
Lights, sirens, the sound of moving cars
Maybe life is about oxygen and lost receipts
A chemical relationship between reason and cigars

I believe this world is thriving on addiction
Not marijuana or the necessity of knowing what you weigh
Because no one here thinks with conviction
It's the atomic bonds of mirrors that lead me astray

I believe in cosmic kissing and something far from love
The chaos of a kaleidoscope or reflections of the moon
It's a theory and a concept that science is devoid of
A code of DNA to which most people are immune

I believe that graffiti creates its own kind of biology
A colorful mess that perfectly describes life
No doctor can ever really understand psychology
Brains are a complex combination of dopamine and strife

I believe in questioning life beyond scientific measures
Sorry, but no experiment can tell me why
Every human on the planet is obsessed with pleasures
Tell me that's false, it's everyone's favorite lie

Sophia Corwin

Smoking Away

This is what she didn't say: to get laid and travel the world was his definition of success. He wanted her to drive him to concerts—not for the music, he'd say—but so that he could wander around smoking pot and waiting to find a girl who would lie between the sheets with him late into the night and then wake up early the next morning and walk into Harvard on a scholarship. She told him that those girls don't exist, that the really smart ones wear modest clothes and lock their virginity in a steel chest and know how to say no to drugs. But he waited to find his girl, because he didn't share her belief that to get into Harvard you have to be perfect. And smoking pot, losing your virginity, and ignoring the music will not keep you perfect.

She is not losing her virginity, but she is losing her mind because the girls who gave up their perfection a long time ago are still walking into Harvard. She wanted to shout at them that delusional smoke rings in dark alleys and ivy on brick shouldn't mix, don't mix, won't mix.

In the video, their eyes were red and their silhouettes sharp against the sky, black and bony. She told herself that they were blowing away their dreams in the smoke, burying their hard work in the ashes, covering the light like the City of Ember. She made a pact to stop living and start focusing, to ignore the people whom she did not aspire to be, and to work in silence and let her success be the voice of her sacrifice. Her problem is that when she ignores people, they ignore her too, and suddenly she's toiling away in silence because no one is there to listen to her success. If a tree falls in the woods, but nobody is there to hear it, did it really make a noise? What about the girl who died underneath it.

They took the video in the woods on Friday night, and if they don't turn themselves in, maybe they will lose their scholarships to Harvard. Because she has learned to focus, she tells herself that these disasters, these drug busts in the woods, these careless sacrifices, make her look better, make her look perfect. Now she will die knowing that those girls have lived, but that she has kept her perfection.

Katherine Anderson

Untitled

Of course I dream of love
I've dreamed of warmth and stars
I've dreamed of happiness and colors and sweetness

But people tell me that this is not love
They tell me that love is excitement and terror
They tell me that love is for when you are older

They tell me to learn before I think
To think before I speak
And that is, it might be better if I don't exist at all

Of course I dream of love
I tell them
Because they look at me with eyes like stone and talking helps the tears lock in

I make up stories about excitement and terror
I make up dreams about being older
And sometimes they believe me

When they don't believe they cast me aside like I am broken
They stop listening
They try to tell my story for me

They may have broken my voice
But I still sing in the night
Of course I dream of love

Anonymous

Cosmic Collision

They say dreaming is a break from reality. An escape from the harsh, eruptive chaos of everyday life, but my dreams are torturous caverns open 24 hours like the diner on Route 12. They glow neon and bright through the night, the terrestrial colors of a distorted and manipulated mind. Compared to the dark highway they seem faint but they are incessant, and ever present. Visions of the typical cosmic collision all around me and of the glorious bursts yet to come, I feel too connected to these false and completely mind shattering phenomena of nature. The observer of—and even partaker in—these unbelievable catastrophic becomings, each second expanding bigger and releasing more and more and brighter and brighter light. The noise is numbing and the light is leavening, pounding me down into acceptance. It wants me to forget and i do, i will, i'll forget it all and manage to pull back my tongue and spread my throat wider and wider till i'm swallowing rocks the size of my head. A head that lets these supernovae in. A head that only wants the quiet dark of deep space. Where i can float, watch the particles, like fey, dance slowly by, illuminated by someone's distant, glowing moon. But my dreams, my sleepwalking mind, will not stand for it. I've known the cosmic roar too long and spent too many a night out on that highway. The neon glow mocking in my mirrors.

Nellie Boyd-Owens

I Had a Dream

I had a dream that I finally understood people. I understood their pointless metaphors, the foolish oxymorons of their lives. The demon in their hearts tells us the bad things of the world, and hide the good. Like the snow that falls and melts away, dreams and hopes fall upon people, make them oblivious and invulnerable to all evil, then melt away in the heat of terrorists and conspiracies. The hell of our world makes murderers a fear of daily lives, and the gut feeling we ignore ultimately leads to our untimely deaths. People strive to hide scars, conceal abnormalities, mask disfigurements. The image of perfect is far from pure, for people who try to be perfect shadow their true form with the latest fashion, red pigments, oiled brushes. Spotless suits and elegant gowns flock their wardrobe; layers of alluring scents and fruitless words shroud their true identity. However, it is the angel in our hearts that navigates the winding roads, that sees the true meaning behind a perfect mask. Identities are revealed, cloaks are lifted, a mystery is solved. Epic stories unfold that fill us with eternal inspiration. Hopes are achieved, dreams are accomplished, and charity makes the dead alive once more. That people enjoy the sunny days, and dance outside on rainy ones. That we are a family, once and for all. The strength and love is one, sins are forgiven, forgotten. There is life in death, and we are all a timeless soul that never dies.

Anonymous

We Are Given a Number

From the moment we are born,
we are given a number.

We are given a number and we are placed into a thousand labeled boxes
with walls too high to climb.

We cut our hair, and we paint our faces
and we cover our bodies as to not scare people.

But what if we were born into another universe?
Would we leave bruises on the rims of foggy cups,
would we cry at the sight of a mirror,
would we wear bifocals to fix our eyes,
to make our vision less blurry?

But everything is blurry, even the blind man knows that.
I wonder if the blind man has a better understanding of life,
or the girl who sleeps on cold sidewalks.
They aren't brainwashed by the women with red lips,
the boys who ride in the back of pickup trucks.

The English language is made up of words to describe how people look.
Once I was myself,
bloody and beautiful and seconds into the world.

But now I have grown.
I have seen the condescending eyes
of people who watch me on the streets,
people who bite their cracked lips and whisper under their breath.
And I have no choice but to care,
because from the moment we are born,
we are given a number.

Bella Greenbacher

The Life and Death of a Poet

To dream, but never to live, I had to wake up. It was then I could feel the beating of my heart, it was then that I decided to face my fate. I would die, and soon, but that didn't mean that my life had to stop, well not yet at least. They called it a tragedy, that a man of my age had been cursed with such a peculiar disease, but I like to look at it as just the way that life works, people live and people die and the world keeps turning. I wish it wouldn't. So I die without ever leaving my mark, without making my change, robbed of my right to alter. My neighbor had said that god would heal me, but I'm not much of a religious type. It's a funny idea, god. One supreme being that creates and enforces all, one supreme being who crafts their lives, a being who lets them suffer. Personally I think it's easier not to believe in god, less frightening. I would die. At the hands of an inoperable heart, and nothing can be done, except to wait. They tell me that it will all be fine, that it will all be over soon, but really I don't mind it that much. I was worried it would hurt, but I was mostly just numb. I started to cry. I'm not quite sure why, but nevertheless tears stream down my face. I'm scared, scared of the unknown, scared of what will happen to my family, scared to be gone. Before my grandfather had died; he had told me to die knowing what it means to be alive. I wasn't quite sure what he meant by that, and I'm not quite sure I fully understand it now, but I think he meant to experience, to live your life to the fullest. I haven't been able to do that. There are so many things I still wanted to experience, so many places I wanted to go, so many emotions I longed to feel. Love. I like to think that's at least part of what my grandfather meant, die knowing you have loved; that you have been loved. I'm not satisfied with how my life has gone, I always thought there would be more time. When I die, I know that I have been loved, and that I have loved, but still it feels like something is missing.

Anonymous



Enid Gallagher

Morality's Legacy is Memory

Morality's legacy is memory
A cruel twist of fate
I told her to remember me
but instead I remember her

A cruel twist of fate
The life in her eyes fading
But instead I remember her
Now I will never have a chance to be forgotten

The life in her eyes fading
The colors of life running together
Now I will never have a chance to be forgotten
And so I suffer from emotions never to be felt and words never to be spoken

The colors of life running together
The moments of time once created now broken
And so I suffer in emotions never to be felt and words never to be spoken
I sit in silence biting my tongue for the ghost of a person no longer here

The moments of time once created now broken
I told her to remember me
but now I sit in silence biting my tongue for the ghost of a person no longer here
Morality's legacy is memory

Connor O'Brien



Yilin Luo

Answered Prayers

Softly, I hear his chest breathing up and down. My head is against it, and I can hear his pulsing heartbeat through his soft flannel shirt. I look up, his intelligent brown eyes gazing down. His warm lips meet mine, and I forget everything. My worries are washed away, and time stops, just for us. The hands around my waist grow tighter, and I know that I am his forever.

He came to me when everything was hopeless. It was when I saw bullets instead of rain, and falling leaves are instead dying songbirds, killed mercilessly for the amusement of my species. I was alone in the darkness, and it almost killed me. Then he came. He sat down with me in my isolated world, and he brought comfort, peace, and hope. But most of all, he brought unconditional love.

He says I am the angel that answered his prayers. He desperately pleaded to God to bring him hope, and that I am his savior. But in return, I say this: You are my savior. You sat down with me, talked with me in my world of chaos and destruction. You are my guardian everlasting, and with him, I feel as if I can go untouched forever. Your protecting hands hold mine and you whisper words of love into my ear that I cannot help but smile in pure happiness.

I asked for help,
And He gave it to me.

My Guardian, my protector,
For all eternity.

Anonymous

The Bridge

Auburn hair reflecting moonlight, cold enough she could see her own breath. The fall would be slower than she ever imagined, the water would be colder than she ever thought. Snowflakes brush against her ghastly silhouette. Spectral, her figure stood against the moon. The wind blowing on her back, pushing her to the edge. Scared to jump, but terrified to stay. The glimmer in her eye quickly became a tear. Teardrops drown her sorrow.

Anonymous

Even Rocks Shatter

They think she's a rock, but she isn't.
She spent too much time trying to harden herself,
so that the pain wouldn't affect her,
so that she could become unaware instead of afraid.

Death is too much for her.
She wasn't able to face his sharp features when he called for her.
She ran from him and his cross-fingered promises.
Death made her crumble, even when she tried so hard to survive.

They think she's a rock, but she isn't.
She tries to hold her head high.
Somedays her limbs will not move for her,
so she sits there and waits for Death to come.

She'd walk down the street, tears streaming down her face.
She'd try to hide from the innocent pedestrians walking,
but they'd only nod at her and move on, invisible support.
So she'd cry into the sewer grates and watch the tears flow away.

She wouldn't let herself break, she wouldn't.
She would crouch and hug herself tightly, holding her broken pieces together.
No one gave her support.
No one else realized.

She tried to hold her head high
but her insides told her to hide.
She wanted not to be seen,
but she was the only thing in focus.

She was Agony in disguise,
her smile painted on,
her eyes only glittering from her tears.
And she let her hair and the shadows consume her features.

Death was too much for her.
She ran from him and his cross-fingered promises.
Death made her crumble, even when she tried so hard to survive.
They thought she was a rock, but she wasn't.

Eliza Bigelow



Enid Gallagher

Helpless

my first thought was helpless
permanent
and now we're desperate
now there's an urgency to understand

people are in the streets
staring into skies and falling stone
they may have already forgotten how to cry
they may already be drowning

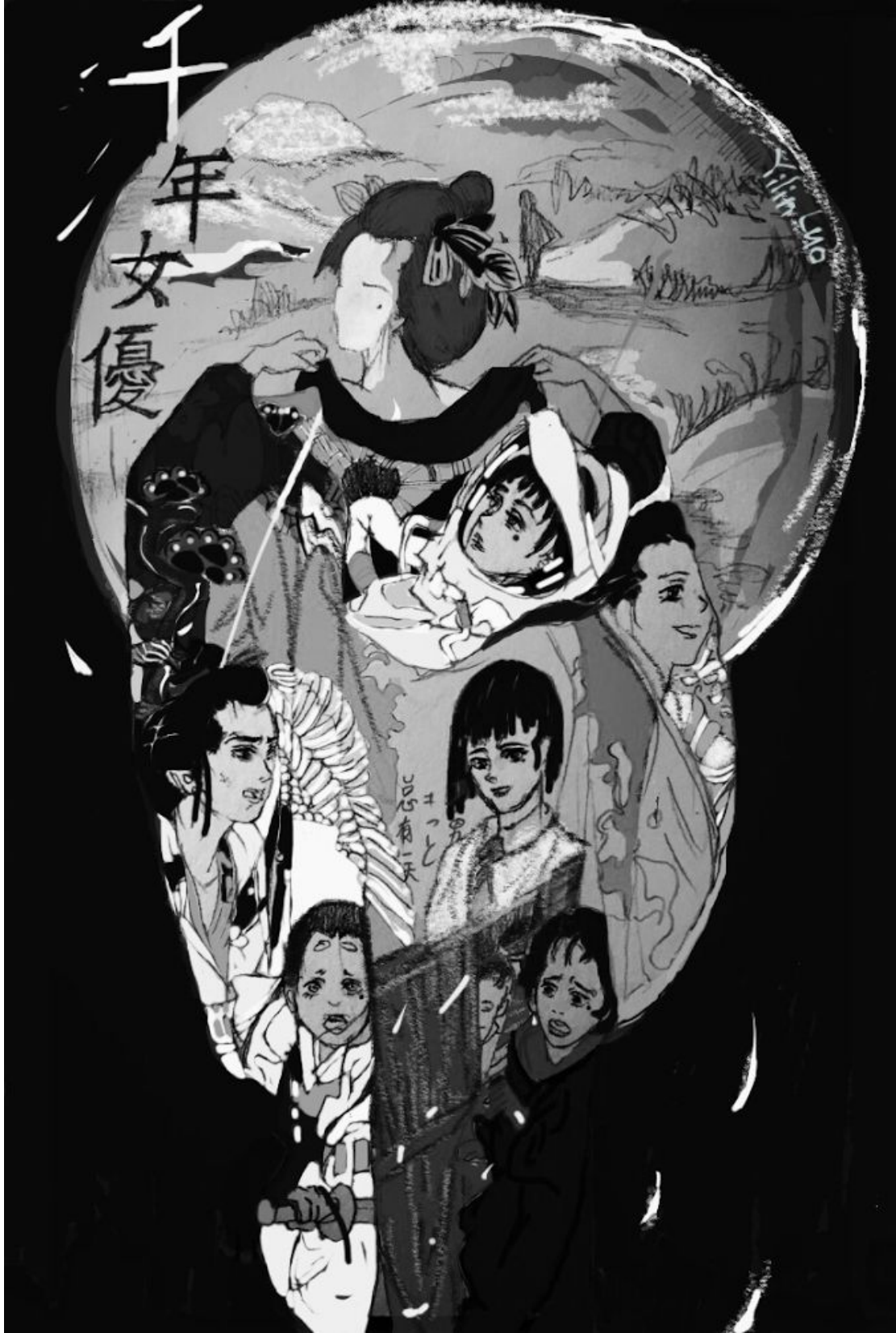
and i have certainly already forgotten how to live without tragedy
it's all around
it's crawling down our throats and choking us from the inside
it's eating our brains

this is what they want
isn't it
they want brides that never see their wedding day
they want funerals in rapid succession

like rapid fire
they know when to strike and they know how to detach
a fatal marriage
with divorces in the night

helplessness hurts

Amelia Chalfant



Yilin Luo

The Masked Man

Both the portrait of the man and the one stealing it were worth quite a lot of money—ten and nine hundred dollars respectively, to be precise. The man depicted was almost handsome, but disproportionate, misshapen, and it irked the thief slightly (though he wouldn't admit it) that the authorities valued him less than the art collectors did an ugly painting.

The painting, to be fair, was over a century old, and the only surviving piece by an artist unknown to all but the most studious of collectors. It was famous not because of its style, age, or history, however, but because talking about it made one appear smarter. To own it would put one above all others, it was a crown jewel among fool's gold. It amused the thief to no end how much money wealthy people spent on ugly things.

Some forty-odd minutes thereafter the thief's departure, police officers began trickling towards, and eventually mulling about, the site. The police, like the horses that drew the inspector's carriage, were gruff and uncooperative; they had been jostled awake just after the harsh dawn pierced the inky swath that concealed those who skulk in the shadows.

The painting was sold three hours after the inspector first crossed the threshold of the lonely room from which it was stolen. The dealer it was sold to called himself "The Gentleman". He was not. He had been a smuggler, he was an alcoholic, and he would tell the inspector everything when questioned.

At the end of what seemed like an eternity of sleepless nights, the inspector stood, solemn, at a small granite gravestone. It was poorly, cheaply made - no one knew who he was, and no one cared. Just another dead thief in a city filled to the brim with scum. He opened his hand, letting a lone rose fall on the newly-dug grave, before tearing his eyes off of the churned dirt and slowly turning away, as if he thought the thief would somehow rise again. Irrational, he thought, shaking his head. Death seemed to be the only thing the thief couldn't cheat.

...

The inspector openly and utterly despised the dealer. Technically, their interactions weren't entirely legal, but with the inexorable rise of crime in the city, desperate measures were called for - under the police chief's nose, of course. The dealer was a spider, he did business with thieves and criminals, building up trust, until finally he informed the police.

"This guy is invisible. No one's seen him, no one knows who he is. He has no code name, no routine, no symbol he leaves behind. What do you have on him?"

"He's good all right. He's sold a few paintings to me, all one of a kind antiques from museums an' private collections," The dealer drawled. "I've never seen 'is face, though, 'e always wears a mask."

...

"Please give me this one, boss," the inspector pleaded. "I've always done well with thieves, you said so yourself - this guy's no different."

"I want to give one of the junior inspectors a chance on this," the police chief replied, but his words fell on deaf ears. The inspector needed this job.

"I'll take one with me, show him around. I don't think any of the new recruits could take this guy. They don't know what they're doing, and by the time they pick up a lead it'll be too late. If I take one with me, he'll get experience and we'll get our guy."

"Very well. Take Osgood, will you? He's eager, but hasn't been out in the field yet. Reminds me of you when you were a junior." He cracked a smile, barely visible under his thick moustache. The inspector smirked.

"Yes sir, thank you sir."

...

The inspector stood crying, silent sobs racking his body like a battered tree in a violent storm. The police chief stood by him, his hand on the inspector's shoulder. Neither man had slept since the incident. Osgood's wife stood facing the two officers on the other side of the empty grave, weeping as well. She never met their eyes.

...

"I don't care if you've never seen his face, Gentleman," the inspector snapped, exaggerating the dealer's fake name. "Tell me where he is."

"I got a couple o' locations, 252 Williamsburg, and 210 Charleston. Possible safe houses, one could be 'is real place," the dealer begrudgingly replied.

"Any fingerprints?"

"He wears gloves." The dealer paused, contemplating. "Whoever this guy is, 'e knows what 'e's doing. I think 'e's a cop or some professional thief with help from the inside. 'E knows when to go for it, 'e's undetectable, 'e's... 'e's too good."

"I asked for this case. I promised Osgood I'd find him as he died. He's good, but no one's perfect." He rose from his chair and walked towards the door. "Thanks for your help."

...

The dealer fumbled with the key as he locked his shop's door, and walked out into the night. Another thief gone, he thought as he passed an alley, his business replaced by another messy wad of bills and coins in his faded overcoat pocket. His smile was cut short by the thief - not yet gone, who quietly laid him down to rest, as a loving mother would her sleeping child.

The dealer's blood was on the thief's hands and later, the inspector's boots. "He's been gone for a while," the inspector told the assisting officers, crouching over the dealer's pale and twisted corpse. "His throat was slit, but there are no signs of a struggle. He has his keys and belongings on him - almost forty dollars, a cigar, keys, and a firearm. He was

probably closing up for the night when he was jumped.” The inspector hesitated, then muttered, “But why? The assailant wasn’t after money or belongings.”

...

The thief struck again that day, and the police chief’s vision clouded with the sudden bittersweet mist of release as dusk fell on the city. The thief gently cradled the dying man’s head, whispering a ghastly secret that would drive the man mad before he finally drifted into peaceful oblivion. The thief then enkindled the building with blazing locks of heat, as if replacing the light he’d just extinguished. He burned with it, and he, along with the building and the police chief, were forever amalgamated in smoky ash.

Incandescent sunlight shone on the inspector and the police officers the next morning like a judgemental spotlight. The fire had ravaged the block before finally relenting to the desperate efforts of the firefighters. Smoke still rose from the debris, and the inspector grimaced, trying not to imagine inhaling the police chief’s remains in spectral wisps of ash. They stood solemnly, not knowing what to say, what could possibly be said.

There were two charred sets of bones found in the ashes, and the thief was presumed dead, and if he was alive, he had vanished without a trace. There never was another theft of his caliber, and all of his files were destroyed in the fire. With the case closed, the inspector resigned. He was an old officer in a new era, he said, and gave his best wishes to the new police chief.

...

The day before he left the city, the inspector paid his last respects to an old friend. Walking towards the carriage waiting for him on the outskirts of the quaint graveyard, he dropped a shadow into a still pond. The mask was covered in a thin layer of dusty silt before the inspector reached the carriage. A perfect crime.

Kyle Mayer

Guilty as Charged

guilty as charged

dark eyes, a helpless heart

deep browns and purples, the shades of regret

small, quiet, and self-contained

dark eyes, a helpless heart

when still, guilt is silent

small, quiet, and self-contained

when shaken, however, it rattles from the depths within
when still, guilt is silent,
we handle it between our fingers
when shaken, however, it rattles from the depths within
crumbling---slowly then faster
we handle between our fingers
feeling the colors fall away
crumbling---slowly then faster
sprinkling shavings of restlessness and remorse
feeling the colors fall away
deep browns and purples, the shades of regret
sprinkling shavings of restlessness and remorse
guilty as charged

Katherine Anderson

Old Black And Blue Eyes

First I see his eyes.
The same electric blue they were years ago.
Next I see the dark shadow that lingers behind them.
The boy I knew no longer resides behind those eyes.
All I see is apprehension.
He was far too innocent to ever be a part of this world.
His blonde hair is now stained a dark velvet red.
I ask how he is: he says he's indifferent to his surroundings.
He lies.
The only thing he's indifferent towards is me.
When I knew him he was a boy; a boy oblivious to the hell we face everyday but they stole that from him. He never knew that injustice is no real crime. Now he is a man and I believe a good one. We just watched as the world tore the boy apart. It breaks my heart to think that the boy I knew is dead but when we pick flowers we always pick the most beautiful.
Now he wears the mask of the man; a facade to hide his vulnerable self.
He'll wear his mask I'll wear mine they don't come cheap, but they fit just fine.

Liam Fisher

Untitled

I had a dream that the world was beautiful and accepted people like me for who we are. I had a dream that the sun shined brighter when I stepped out the door. I had a dream that I danced through the meadows, the flowers pained to perfection just for me. I had a dream that she sat on a distant hill, her arms opened wide, and I flew into her soul. I had a dream that I rode the wind. I had a dream that I claimed the sky. I had a dream that I owned the world and sorrow was obliterated for all eternity.

I had a dream that the caged bird sang as the orange light carried him away. But the free bird leaps on the back of the wind and drifts downstream till the current ends, and the caged bird stands on the grave of dreams his shadow shouts on a nightmare's scream. I had a dream that the world was beautiful and the caged bird flew by the freebird's side. I had a dream that a crow could fly by a robin's side and the orange lite would carry them both away.

Anonymous

Untitled

Veins are blue and blood is red and muscle is everything in between. Bone is bare and nerves probably shimmer and I'm sure that ligaments would cry if they ever got to see the moon. When God created people, and if God created people do you think he took an extra special amount of time adding the perfect amount of sunlight to every sinew and crevice in the human body. Do you think God made sure that every bump on every person was just high enough, and that every toe and finger opened up to something different. Or do you think people were simply smashed together? A smiling catastrophe of bone marrow and blood cells and organs. Maybe God doesn't know what he did and maybe no one will ever know what he meant to do

Leni Sperry-Fromm



Sophia Corwin

Why I Cry Sometimes

In her tiny hand God
lives. In
every palmate line
and miniature exclusive whorl
Exists the world

She is elegant and
Sublime

some
times
I
find:

sublime= beautiful + terrifying

is. exactly.

is. Concrete.

never need I enter
Houses. Of
worship Houses
of Glass and Steel

home is.
i am.
In this tiny palm
where god lives
and laughs
and drools
and walks
and is the whole world

Jamison Isler

Based on a Dream

The world is filled with an unnatural amount of reflective water. Mountains, deserts, even cities are scattered with mirrors. The world is in a light blue tint. The temperature everyday is 45 degrees. People have acclimated, but the declining air quality makes for higher insanity rates somehow. No one explains it too well.

I live on a couch on top of an old foundation from a small house. I don't have a roof, walls, or any other furnishings, but I do own a nice blanket. I have a girl who I like; she works with me at the local co-op. The co-op is for sick people; we sell them vegetables at a discounted price. It used to be free until the government had to tax it.

I should mention that this girl has a husband who began exhibiting signs of the mental illness known as *Conatis*. She still stays with him although he nears death.

Many doubt the legitimacy of drugs, which could prevent such illnesses. Some report that it actually makes the process worse and heightens the danger of the person using the medicine. A *reverse-sedative*, if you will.

I'm comfortable with my life. Although my parents both went insane when I was 12, I feel as if I'm going to be okay and live for years and years and years. Of course, there are two types of people in the world today. Those who wish to die soon and avoid possible sickness and those who want to live for years and then see the day when the world is reversed. I would like to see the world end, but I want to die honorably.

When I graduated primary education, a man in a real pretty suit and tie told us to, if the situation should present itself, die for the ones you love. He said that life is short, so why

spend your death in a dishonorable way, when you could easily be remembered for the great way in which you met your demise. I always kept what he finished off the speech with in the back of my head: *Live Short, Die Honorably*.

I suppose my co-op work is honorable when weighed out by the mass populous. I volunteer my life and do not make any sales commissions. Therefore, I suppose if I die one day at the co-op, it will be with honor.

I get scared that the girl I like will die one day at work and then I'll have nobody to love. Then I'll have to take my own life, for nothing would be worth living for.

Speaking of her, today was she and her husband's 5-year anniversary. That means I've feigned at least five smiles since I met her.

She called me at a late hour one night, crying about her husband trying to hurt her and she needed someone to come and sedate him. She lived quite close by. I walked instead of drove.

I found her front door open and heard her screaming from within the house. Her husband had written bible verses on the walls of the dining and living room. Upstairs, he was banging on a bathroom door with a candlestick. He couldn't hear me over his Shakespearean-like rants. I snuck into their bedroom to grab the tranquilizer shots in her bed stand. It was easy putting him out of commission for the night; he wasn't too far into the hysteria.

She tied him down to their bed and blindfolded him in case he woke up. Her and I went downstairs, and I looked at her wounds. He had clawed her cheek, arms and neck. She was extremely quiet that night, and I could tell she was hiding tears of exhaustion and pain. I'm guessing she was sad that her husband was dying too.

I cleaned off the walls with a rag and water. She asked me to pour her some red wine and warm up a Pecan Pie she had been saving. Although it was late, we drank, ate, and watched the news.

There were more and more stories about people mistaking puddles in the world for gaps. That is another thing that plagues Earth: giant scattered holes, which bear resemblance to that of mirror puddles. No one can really explain this anomaly. How can a hole that leads to the core of the world look like a puddle of water? It is part of the reason that people say the world is ending.

She told me that there were more and more puddles forming on her property and that she wants a professional to look at them and determine if they are holes or, in fact, water.

I spent the night with her, and she actually fell asleep on my shoulder. I drank the rest of the wine. It was a Sunday.

Her husband awoke with a start at 7:30am. He didn't scream, shout, or try to escape. He simply called to his wife that he was awake. She undid the harnesses, and he rose to get dressed. He was normal. The insanity comes and goes for most of its victims. It slowly transitions into full-time insanity after a couple of months.

Her husband is a very kind gentleman when he's not trying to kill you. He'll look you in the eyes and call you "sir" or "ma'am" depending on your gender. Even I, a five-year friend of this courtly gentleman, was called "sir."

He worked for the government for a long while following his career in the military. His job in the government was Secretary of State. He stepped down as the world began to fall apart, so about a year before the President announced that the Earth was slowly dying.

Now he works for a solar panel company as a receptionist. He's quite good at his job, apparently.

I left her house to go back home on my day-off. I sat on my couch throwing pebbles at a puddle to test if it were a gap or not. Luckily, it was safe. I own an ATV, so I drove that around in the hills nearest to my foundation. There were too many puddle gaps, so I had to shut down for the week. Having fun was becoming increasingly difficult.

It was around a week later that a doctor diagnosed me with Pre-Insanity. He informed me that, although my natural tendencies were, well, natural; I would slowly begin exhibiting signs of confusion and unnatural anger. He told me that someone would most likely end up killing me out of fear for his or her life.

He actually congratulated me for making it so far into my life. Apparently, I outlived the average.

I went back to the co-op and quit, because that's the law. My fellow co-workers gave me sad smiles and pats on the back as I left. The girl who I loved was not there that day.

Luckily, someone told her I had been diagnosed. She came to my foundation and gave me a nearly 10 minute hug before allowing me to speak. She brought me a bottle of the red wine we had shared at her house that last week. Jokes on her, I don't own any glasses. I only own a couch, a blanket, an ATV, and a cell phone. What a weird assortment of things to own!

I maintained my usual decorum while talking to her. I didn't have to explain the illness at all, for she knew about it. She was just sad that it was consuming yet another one of her loved ones.

At one point in the conversation, she began talking about re-marrying once someone kills her husband. She began to talk about how she would love to have married me if that were the case.

At that moment, I began exhibiting early stages of insanity. Every third word I spoke was involuntarily backwards, and every so often words ending in vowels would turn into screams. I scared her at first, but then she told me to stop talking and lay down.

Before she left, she kissed me, smiled while tears filled her blue eyes, and walked to her vehicle. I wasn't too sure what to do after that. A kiss from the girl I loved for years hadn't fully satisfied me. I was confused, to say the least.

Beyond that, I found myself not fearing the concept of death. It is something that the world knows nowadays, with insanity riots and forced exterminations riddling the United States. Though our Union holds (somewhat) strong, the people within it are weakening. On the final day in which the Earth orbits the sun, the people who inhabit it will be far too ready for Armageddon. It will be a day where both insane and sane will rejoice in the fervor which materializes and destroys the planet, seeping through the gaps and expelling the water.

I wondered if I was going to be able to experience that, but only time would tell, and I'm only in the initial stages.

The days flew by, my insanity ebbing away at me. Doctors and nurses traveled to my foundation to administer daily restraints, tranquilizer shots, and daily meals to fit my new diet of zero gluten or sugar. The only time I had alone was the six hours I was allowed to sleep, but for those six the mania flooded my brain and blotted out any original thought I could process.

I was allowed to walk a trail one day without the aid of a doctor. I found a puddle gap and comprehended jumping into it just incase it did lead to the void. I did. It was only a puddle of water. I went home, finding that there was more to life than jumping into puddles for hours on end.

I gained consciousness one night. The ringtone on my cell phone was melodious enough to break my dementia. It was the girl who I loved. She told me her husband had climaxed.

When one's insanity climaxes, there is nothing stopping them for killing everyone in sight. My ATV was useless, so I ran. I kept playing the ringtone repeatedly to stay alert in my human mind.

Every door and window was open in her house. I grabbed a sharpened stick from the forest and made my way inside. I heard her husband, the former Secretary of State, screaming Plato quotes from the kitchen.

There he stood, face cloaked in white makeup, wielding a meat cleaver, chopping a pillow in half. His villainous grin widened when he saw me. He jumped the kitchen counter and made a dead sprint at me.

I ran outside, trying to find a better weapon than a stick in the shortest amount of time possible. He caught onto me, flinging his clever at a high speed in downward-chopping motions. I held my stick up to block him, but he was relentless, thus chopping it in half. He chased me into the woods, down a hill, where we both toppled and bruised ourselves.

The clever he held was stuck in my back. I struggled to get up, but he got the jump on me. He clawed at my face, chest, neck, and stomach as the clever sank deeper into my spine. I finally found the willpower to rip the clever from my back and jab it into his rib cage. He gasped and sputtered for air, which allowed me to stand. However, he was still able to fight.

At that moment, I thought my insanity had climaxed as well. The pain in my back subsided, as did the stinging claw marks all over the front of my body. My mind felt as if a uranium bullet had been fired into an atom, causing a chain reaction of explosive proportions. My eyes turned white, my hands became fists, and I was finally determined to destroy the thing in front of me.

Then, from the top of the hill, the girl who I loved screamed to me, and my insanity subsided. I looked at her longingly, knowing that, considering the circumstances, I would never be with her. However, knowing how important her well being is to me, neither the man I faced nor me could go near her.

I approached the man swiftly, grabbing his weak body with my fists. Nearby, there was a puddle gap. Wait was it a puddle? Was it a gap? I wasn't sure, nor was anyone. The girl I loved hadn't called a professional to determine this. Therefore, I took the chance, diving into that puddle gap with the insane man in the hands of an equally insane man.

The last thing I heard was the girl I loved calling her husband's name.

Benjamin Michalak

Preview of "Whispers in the Aether"

Adum was hunched over his workbench, bent over his tedious work. He looked up occasionally, glancing at the ancient leather-bound book opened in front of him. Slowly, gently, he added ingredients to a thin vial, being sure to follow the recipe exactly. He was oblivious to all except his work. He was tired and hungry, as he hadn't eaten or slept in days. This was too important to break away from. But, at last, he achieved his goal. The potion was finally done. A luminous black liquid swirled in the vial, as if trying to find a form to shape into. Adum leaned back in his chair, the substance in his hand, and smiled. He then laughed, chuckling at first, and then went hysterical. My work is done, he thought. I have all power. With this, I control everything. With this, I rule the world.

Thorn was sitting on the edge of the fountain in the town square. She watched as the crowd scattered in all directions, trading goods in the weekly market. A soft breeze blew, and her waist-length, feathery brown hair fluttered around her. Her soft silver eyes scanned the edges of the courtyard. A few children stared, fascinated by the workings of a

simple top in the cobblestone ground. Two men, leaning against the wall of a brick building, drink, smoke, and talk about their troubles with their oblivious lives. Women talk in groups, gossiping about the latest rumors. Thorn closed her eyes, the multiple voices ringing into one in her ears.

An assassin looks down at his target from the top of the church spire. He is invisible, undetectable to the naked eye. He looks down in the square, people like ants from the view. His target, a wispy-haired girl sitting on the edge of the fountain, looks from left to right, but not up. He smiles inwardly and disappears off the spire, planning his ultimate move.

Anonymous



Enid Gallagher

The Frog

“You’ll never catch us!” I yelled to the wind. Matan’s black hair flew as we ran. “Yeah! Ha ha!” Vivian laughed. We could see the door as it swung slowly shut. All we had to do was get through and we’d be safe. In the edge of my sight, I saw three boys rounding the corner, running after us. We reached the door. I slipped my fingers in between the door and the wall, pushed out, and slammed the door behind us. Yes! We were safe! We were triumphant.

We were four years old. Matan, Vivian and I went to the same preschool. I guess you could say we weren’t exactly friends by choice. We weren’t forced together by *anything* we had in common but more by a person we had in common. To be precise, an enemy. *Bryce*.

On one of the first days of school, Matan, Vivian, and I happened to all be in the playground together. I was on the swings, Matan was playing in the sandbox, and Vivian was climbing on the climbing structure. We were all minding our own business, when all of the sudden Bryce walked up. He lifted his hands and made finger guns at us. "Bang!" He shouted. Vivian looked up, "What?" "Ba-boom!" He yelled. He aimed his fingers at us. "Shoot your heads off!" "Umm... Those aren't real guns." Matan pointed out. "Yeah, those are just your hands." I added. "I know!" He shouted indignantly, stomping his feet. "But my daddy's a plo... a plo-lice officer and I'm gonna bring in his guns tomorrow." "But-" Vivian started. "Just let him walk away." I whispered. Bryce marched off. "Tomorrow's Saturday." She pointed out. "No school." "Yeah, I know." And so from that point on, we were a gang. Our gang's one and only purpose: to figure out how to beat Bryce.

"You've got to admit." Matan was saying at one of our daily recess meetings, "He's got style. I mean, that whole 'ba-boom' thing was just great." We both nodded, having to agree with that. "I just don't see how we can best him." Vivian looked worried. "He hasn't brought in the guns yet, but it could be any day. I mean, what do our dad's do? Mine does real estate, Noah's dad is a doctor, and your dad is a judge." "Ooh, I've got it!" I said. "Matan's dad can make a case that Bryce, I don't know, did something bad, and then he can make Bryce go to jail." I rubbed my hands together in excitement. Ooooh, this was going to be good. "Uh, Noah? That's not quite how it works." "Aw, dang it." I kept thinking. "Maybe my dad could buy his house and then not give it back unless he promised to not bring in his daddy's guns." Vivian mused. "Oh, never mind, he probably wouldn't even keep his promise." Matan stroked his chin. Just then, the bell rang. "Till another day." Right-O," said Matan, "Tomorrow?" "Sounds good."

But we didn't know that after that was winter vacation, and once we got back, we just kept on getting into the same argument over and over again. Matan would say, "We just need to face him. Fight him." But Vivian would always bring the logical point up. "He might have the guns." Occasionally we would spy. On one of these espionage missions, Matan (the smallest) was hiding behind a tree, watching Bryce on the swings when he made an important revelation. "He has two croneys!" Matan exclaimed, short of breath as he ran back from behind the tree. "They go wherever he goes and they follow his every command." "Oh great," I moaned, "For all we know one of their dads might be a firefighter and the kid will bring in his flamethrower." I buried my head in my hands. Tears dripped down my palms. "Noah," Matan said, "Firefighters don't fight with fire, they fight against it." "Oh right." I said, wiping off my eyes.

But it wasn't until April that we made our first big breakthrough. We were going through the classic argument when suddenly a lightbulb went off in my head. "Wait." I interrupted. "Maybe we're going about it all wrong. Bryce is fighting us with his dad. Maybe we have to fight back with our dads." "It's worth trying." Matan nodded. "I guess. Sure." Vivian said. "Well," I thought aloud, "We already ruled out both of your dad's, so I guess mine's the only one left." "What does he do?" Matan asked. "He's a doctor. He helps save people." "I got it!" Vivian shouted. "We'll save him to death." Her expression changed from ecstatic to confused. "Why did I say that?" "Yeah. Not sure." Matan said. "But Noah, what does he do? It's gotta be here somewhere. What has he done recently with you?" "He told me this funny fairy tale last night before bedtime." I said, smiling as I recalled it. "There was this really handsome prince who wanted to marry the princess, and he wouldn't stop

bothering her, but she didn't like him because he was mean, so she had the sorcerer turn him into a frog. Then this old man came, and I don't know, he must have liked frogs or something, because he picked him up and kissed him, and he turned back into a human and he lived with the old man happily ever after." "Wait." I could tell Matan had thought of something. "There was something in there. I'm sure of it. Wait. Handsome yet mean. No, that's not it. He's both ugly and mean. Beautiful princess? No, definitely not. Turn him into a frog? No... Wait, that's it! Turn him into a frog! It's genius!" "You're right!" Vivian exclaimed. "Nobody will ever know, and once he's a frog, he can't possibly pick up any sort of gun. It's perfect." "Indeed it is. Indeed it is." I responded. "But how do we do it?" Matan mused. "You can't exactly just tell him to turn into a frog and expect him to do it." "Yeah, he's just not that trustworthy." I agreed.

The next day, we finalized the date. "Tomorrow?" I proposed. "No. I've got a doctor's appointment." Vivian stated. "OK... next Monday?" "No. My brothers are going to be here." Matan shook his head. "Ok, then it's gotta be... next Tuesday." "That's good with me." Matan shrugged. "It's a date." Vivian said.

And so it was. That next Tuesday morning, right before school, we convened shortly in our usual spot: the swings. "OK, here's the scoop." I informed him. "First thing during recess we go up to Bryce. Now the trick is we have to convince him he wants to be a frog. Now for this, I thought somebody that was persuasive would be the best. So I think Vivian should do it. Remember that time you had me totally convinced I wanted to give you my Oreos?" I still don't know how she did that. "Oh yes I do." She rubbed her hands together as the sides of her lips curved slightly up to form an evil smile. "Great. Just make him think he's a frog." This next part I had thought out long and hard. The magic. In the book Dad read to me, the sorcerer just said some magic rhyming words and ka-boom, the prince was a frog. But that just didn't seem like it was enough. "Matan, you're going to have to dance." "What?" He looked mad. "Well, I thought it through long and hard, and if I just say the magic words, he'll probably punch me. I'm sorry Matan, it's the only way. Can you dance?" He sighed, did a pirouette and somersaulted into a bow. "Very good." We applauded. But the next part was the hardest to decide. The closing spell. "The binding magic." I said. "What to do for the binding magic?" "Ooh! Ooh!" Vivian shouted. "I've got it. We race Bryce and his cronies to the back door of the school. If we can get in first and lock them out, then we win, and the spell is binded." "Well that's a stupid-..." I started. "Hey, that's actually not a bad idea." "Then it's set." Matan said happily. "For freedom!" "For freedom," we echoed.

We met that day at our normal spot and after a short meeting, we approached Bryce and his friends. It was Vivian's turn. We were all waiting on her. "So Bryce, what do you want to be when you grow up?" "Huh?" He looked up from his work in the sandbox. "I always thought you would be a nice frog." "A nice what?" One of his croneys asked. "Yes. A nice frog. A great frog. One of the best frogs." "Why are you talking to me?" Bryce sneered at her. "Well, you know. We're graduating from preschool soon, and I think it's time to start thinking about careers." He looked bewildered. "Hmm. I should be a frog?" "Well, I mean, I guess you don't have to." "Good." Bryce said. "Now can you please leave? We have important stuff to do." "OK." Vivian said, completely in control. "But what a waste it would be. I mean, what else could you possibly do with your life?" She turned around and pretended to start walking away. OK. If this works, it'll work in 3... 2... "Fine. How do you become a frog?" Inside, I silently cheered. "Noah will show you how to." We had planned

this part out already. She would tell Bryce all he needed to do was listen to me for a minute. "All you have to do," she said, "is listen to what Noah's going to say." "Why?" He looked confused. "His grandmother was a master frog transformer. Have you never heard of Amphibia Frogalump?" "Uh, no." "Well, that's weird." She awkwardly shrugged it off. I decided to take over. I gave Matan the signal we had agreed upon. He assumed his twirl position. "Wait, why is Matan dancing?" One of the cronies asked. "Oh," I gulped, "No reason." And so I began the spell. "Witches of flames, and wizards in bogs. The good knight's bane, turned into a frog." I paused and looked over my shoulder. Matan came up from a somersault behind me. He nodded encouragement towards me and I continued. "This magical day the spell shall be done. We'll go on our way, the battle will be won." I paused again. I looked at Bryce. He stared at me incredulously. I took that as a good sign and chanted the last line. "For a new age to start and have new freedom found, the door must be locked and the spell must be bound." I bowed and Matan did one last pirouette. "Wait." Bryce looked utterly clueless. "I'm not a frog." "Of course not." I said "Didn't you hear the last line of the spell? We have to race you to the door of the school. If we get in first and lock you out, you're a frog." I let it sink in. "Forever." "Wait, what?" One of his cronies asked. "Bryce has to be a frog forever?" "Yeah." I said. "Let the race begin!" They didn't start racing. "Well, what are you waiting for?" Bryce shouted. "Start running!" We all started sprinting towards the door. We pulled ahead of them and turned the corner.

"You'll never catch us!" I yelled to the wind. Matan's black hair flew as we ran. "Yeah! Ha ha!" Vivian laughed. We could see the door as it swung slowly. All we had to do was get through and we'd be safe. In the edge of my sight, I saw three boys rounding the corner, running after us. We reached the door. I slipped my fingers in between the door and the wall, pushed out, and slammed the door behind us. Yes! We were safe! We were triumphant.

"Woohoo!" We shouted together and danced around. I walked up to the door and looked through it to see Bryce banging on the door. For some reason his cronies hadn't followed him. "Oh look!" I said to Matan and Vivian. "It's a frog!" "It looks sad." Vivian remarked. "Oh, don't feel bad for it." "Yeah," I agreed, "Maybe an old man will find it and kiss it."

To this day, I'm still great friends with both Matan and Vivian. And I guess the funny part is, we never would have become friends if it weren't for a megalomaniac preschooler, and a magical frog spell.

Noah Friedman-Kassis



Yilin Luo

Retrieving Items of Value from an Operating Garbage Disposal

Upon further reflection,
a critical review
of the transcript
of our latest
discussion
notes scenarios posited,
positions taken, and proposals made,
that, with clearer analysis,
are, at best,
forgotten.
Suffice it to say,
many of my suggestions, If not impossible, are
at best impractical,
probably ill advised.
Especially my last,
the specific wording of which leaves me confused
as to
exactly what
idea I meant to convey,
justifying your very urgent inquiry
as to what possible benefit
might have been gained
from its expression.

Jamison Isler



yilin luo

Yilin Luo