Editorial Staff

Editor: Nicholas Schevera
Assistant Editors: Karen Braun, Susan Daugherty, Lee-Ann Frega
Art Editor: Robert C. Lossmann
Cover Art: Clare Misko
Inside Cover Art: Linda Rodriguez
Design and Production: Elaine Lazarus, College of Lake County Public Relations and Marketing

Prairie Voices is a collection of student writing and art published annually in April. It represents the diverse voices of the student community of the College of Lake County. We accept creative nonfiction, including essays, as well as creative fiction, including short stories and poetry. Please type, proof-read and double-space each submission, before submitting via e-mail as a MS Word attachment to assist us in the editing process. Include your name, address and phone number, along with a brief autobiographical sketch relating information about your family, interests, hobbies and career goals.

For orders or inquiries, contact:
Prairie Voices
Nicholas Schevera
Communication/Arts Division
College of Lake County
19351 W. Washington St., Room B265
Grayslake, IL 60030
(847) 543-2959
E-mail: com409@clcillinois.edu

Copies are available in the CLC bookstore for $10 per issue.
Copyright 2021 by Prairie Voices
# List of Writers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The True Terror: Exploring Gender and Race Representation in Horror Movies</td>
<td>Simon Sazian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Severity of Silence</td>
<td>John R. Beranek</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hellish Dreams</td>
<td>John R. Beranek</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a Man?</td>
<td>Kat Mamulashvili</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauntering Down the Busy Street</td>
<td>Chris Pittman</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to America</td>
<td>Za’Tozia Duffie</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Deeper Message in WALL·E</td>
<td>Stephen Kelley</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station Road</td>
<td>Ciara White</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Final Beginning</td>
<td>Karen Moreno</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m Going to be a Robot Doctor: The Lives of Childhood Identity</td>
<td>Anne Ahern</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Dream Car</td>
<td>Aidan Caras</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Very Hungry Caterpillar: How I Became a Butterfly</td>
<td>Stephanie Cave</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left and Right</td>
<td>Maria Alberto</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sorrow of Oak Street</td>
<td>John R. Beranek</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Barn</td>
<td>Aubrey Moehlenpah</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Childhood Memory: The Hills Laugh Too</td>
<td>Aubrey Moehlenpah</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fate</td>
<td>Cassandra Lynn Ronning</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a Shadow</td>
<td>Rachel Carter</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current (of) Thought in Quarantine</td>
<td>Rachel Carter</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By a Thread</td>
<td>Skylar Jaffe</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Artists

Clare Misko, oil..................................................front and back cover
Linda Rodriguez, oil............................................inside front cover
Rhiannon Swanson, oil..........................................8
Kazuko Kawai, oil..................................................9
Joselyn Duvon, ink/collage.......................................11
Shuchuan Chiang, watercolor.........................12-13
Sungah Jung, watercolor.........................................14-15
Patricia Waugh, ceramics.......................................20
Janet Kemp, ceramics............................................21
Ron Ballok, photography.......................................22
Bernadette Petty, watercolor..................................25
Joselyn Duvon, watercolor/coffee..........................26-27
Clare Misko, watercolor........................................29
Ivan Vasquez, oil..................................................30-31
Mo Valencia, charcoal..........................................33
Bernadette Petty, watercolor..................................34
Sarah Kamp, watercolor........................................35
Shuchuan Chiang, oil............................................37
Lainey Sears, watercolor.........................................38
Shuchuan Chiang, watercolor..................................39
Jesus Ortega, oil..................................................41
Tanner Newman, oil............................................43
Nick Schevera, watercolor.......................................46
Lisa Murphy, charcoal............................................47
Evelyn Schiele, watercolor......................................49
Sungah Jung, watercolor........................................52
Jim Morgan, ceramics..........................................53
Sarah Paveglio, watercolor.....................................56
Linda Beitzel, watercolor.......................................57
Rakesh Rustagi, ceramics.......................................58
Laura Tumminello, ceramics...................................59
Anne Bernard-Pattis, ceramics..............................59
Sarah Kamp, watercolor.........................................60-61
Judith Sweetwood, oil...........................................66-67
Sungah Jung, watercolor.........................................68-69
Bernadette Petty, watercolor..................................70
Mo Valencia, gouache...........................................71
Daniel Duron, graphite pencil.................................73
Ed Watson, charcoal............................................75
Ivan Vasquez, oil..................................................76-77
Daniel Duron, watercolor....................................79
Sungah Jung, watercolor.........................................80
Hanna Pease, watercolor.......................................80

The True Terror: Exploring Gender and Race Representation in Horror Movies

Simon Sazian

Since the invention of motion pictures, directors and audiences alike have been captivated by fear as a form of entertainment. With the first horror films produced before the dawn of the 20th century, the genre continues to grow and maintain its reputation as a powerful force in modern pop culture, with each notable recent entry attempting to capture the thrill of terrified viewers worldwide. Film has always been able to elicit nearly every kind of emotion in viewers, allowing them insight into experiences and stories, which would have been impossible in our physical world. Throughout the century and a half during which film has conveyed stories, women and people of color have been underrepresented in nearly every major genre. Notably, modern horror is the only genre in which women appear in speaking roles just as often as their male counterparts (Younger). However, women and people of color have inevitably been entwined with oppressive tropes, character archetypes, and storylines commonly found within the horror genre.

However, women and people of color have inevitably been entwined with oppressive tropes, character archetypes, and storylines commonly found within the horror genre. The New York Film Academy provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of horror cinema history. The dawn of the 1900s saw the rise of film adaptations of gothic horror literature, resulting in the creation of the “Universal Classic Monsters” during the Golden Age of Hollywood in the 1930s such as *The Mummy, The Wolf Man, Dracula, and Frankenstein*. The transition of such publicly known fictional characters to the big screen had a profound effect on the genre, propelling it to be universally known and formally acknowledged as “horror.” Following this, the second World War brought about a shift from the supernatural horror found in monsters and lore to more human characters to personify the enemies of the western Allied powers. In the 50s and 60s, the genre experienced radical experimentation with little success in the box office. However, it should be noted that English director Alfred Hitchcock dominated the 60s, establishing the Slasher genre with his 1960 hit *Psycho*, earning him the title of “Master of Suspense” due to his exceptional talent using psychological suspense to create terrifying films. To clarify, a Slasher horror film is one where a group or individual is being chased and/or killed through the use of a bladed weapon, most commonly a knife. The subgenre would also dominate the decades to come, as the 70s, and 80s marked a shift from “classic” horror to a more modern version, leading to the creation of supernatural, gore, zombie, and psychological horror subgenres, all of which are still present in the current state.
of horror cinema (New York Film Academy). Throughout each decade and evolution of the genre, there have been recurrent themes and plot devices used to elicit fear at the expense of underrepresented demographics; however, not all of those tropes have been completely negative in the grand scheme of the genre.

The Final Girl Trope, a term coined by Carol J. Clover, is predominantly found in popular Slasher films in the decades leading up to the turn of the century. The trope describes a common motif in horror where a lone female, who is the sole survivor of a now-murdered group of friends, is chased by a villain, usually a man with some level of supernatural ability. She eventually confronts and overcomes that villain due to her higher “level” of morality because she is a virgin and refrains from activities or substances deemed immoral (Lattila).

The Final Girl Trope...describes a common motif in horror where a lone female, who is the sole survivor of a now-murdered group of friends, is chased by a villain, usually a man with some level of supernatural ability. She eventually confronts and overcomes that villain due to her higher “level” of morality because she is a virgin and refrains from activities or substances deemed immoral (Lattila).

Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974) is regarded as the first true instance of the Final Girl trope, where we are introduced to the innocent and abstinent Sally Hardesty. This kicked off the so-called “Golden-Age” of Slasher films with prominent Final Girls like Laurie from Halloween (1978), Nancy from A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984), and many notable entries from the Friday the 13th movie series (Abad-Santos). Most final girl depictions during the era do not deviate much, as they are beautiful, young, abstinent and morally “pure” women who are the most innocent of their friends, and they almost never know who their killer is. However, this trope has seemingly decreased from its peak in the late 70s and early 80s, as one of the last “true” Final Girl Tropes found in the slasher film genre is Sidney Prescott from the 1996 slasher Scream. However, what makes Sidney a notable last entry to the list of final girls is that she is made to survive her encounter with the killer; even after she has sexual intercourse, marking a shift in the societal attitudes and beliefs of what a woman “should” and “should not” be able to do. The film went on to be one of the most influential, inspiring a chain of sequels, spin-offs, and separate series such as the “Scary Movie” films, essentially a comedic take on all the tropes found within popular horror films (Appugliesi). Nonetheless, Scream was the final “knife in the back” for the Final Girl Trope, as well as the slasher subgenre as a whole, serving as the last-of-its-kind in regards to the outdated moral principles which were once expected of women.

Aside from being an era-defining theme which impacted countless films, the Final Girl Trope also has underlying moral implications, alluding to societal attitudes and consequences to women deemed deviant. The Final Girl’s friends are usually seen smoking, drinking, having sex, and listening to rock & roll, all of whom are killed during the film until the Final Girl faces the killer. However, many critics of the theory disagree, arguing that the trope forces male audiences to identify and sympathize with a strong female who ultimately triumphs over her killer and achieves security because of her strength and intelligence (Lattila). It is clear to see that regardless of the motives behind the directors’
inclusion of Final Girl Trope, it allows women to shine in leading roles, a feat which would not be easily accessible to them in most other genres. While the motive behind the theme itself can be problematic, its inclusion has seen an overall positive impact on gender diversity in films. Horror is the only exception to the phenomena present in movies where men are given speaking roles twice as often as women are, leading more women to be interested in viewing horror films than most genres (Younger). Brianna Wu, journalist for The Guardian, explains, “Horror movies are a world where money can’t save you, privilege can’t save you, strength can’t save you,” adding that it serves as a sort of level playing field where both male and female actors and viewers are equally vulnerable and afraid (qtd in Berlatsky). Fear serves as an incredible equalizer for all people, which is why the Final Girl Trope, while flawed, was a necessary step to reach the current state of equal gender representation in the horror genre.

Equal representation in horror films has unfortunately not been extended to people of color as far as it has for women, as there are seemingly still many discriminatory tropes to be found. One such trope is the “First To Die” concept, where African-American characters are supposedly the first to be killed within a horror movie. However, a study conducted by Complex concludes that in the 50 horror films featuring a black character spanning 1968 until the present, only 10% of films depict them to be the first to die on screen (Barone). Black characters are still very unlikely to survive until the end of most films, serving as secondary or tertiary deaths. While Token Minority characters are commonplace in mainstream action and adventure films for the sake of inclusion, the modern era of horror has seemingly moved away from such stereotypes, as writers have realized an increasingly diverse audience for which they must write. The rise of prominent African-American actors in Hollywood has also played a significant role in diminishing the severity of the First To Die stereotype, as film producers understand the value which a variety of leading and supporting characters can bring to film ratings and reception.

While the horror genre has begun to gradually include African-American diversity in its productions, sadly the same cannot be said for other minority groups who commonly face discrimination. Specifically, Native American culture is commonly stereotyped for the purpose of creating suspense or horror based on the ignorance of the viewing audience. Examples of such include the “Indian Burial Ground,” where places are supposedly haunted for being built atop a Native American cemetery, or the “Magical Negro,” a minority character usually who knows the true power of the antagonist only to be ignored by the lead characters and killed by the villain (Tranchell). Such tropes have been commonplace throughout horror cinema, from Amityville Horror (1979), The Shining (1980), and the hit 90s horror show Buffy The Vampire Slayer to even children’s shows such as Scooby-Doo or The Simpsons (Lewis). The film and cultural stereotype that Native peoples somehow have a deeper connection to an afterlife or a supernatural realm, and that there is always a “Native Elder” to warn the white protagonists of the imminent danger is a trope which carries

It is clear to see that regardless of the motives behind the directors’ inclusion of Final Girl Trope, it allows women to shine in leading roles, a feat which would not be easily accessible to them in most other genres.

It is clear to see that regardless of the motives behind the directors’ inclusion of Final Girl Trope, it allows women to shine in leading roles, a feat which would not be easily accessible to them in most other genres.
damaging implications, as it diminishes the true meaning behind the Native stories and traditions upon which racist stereotypes have been built and victimizes yet another oppressed group.

From the creation of the genre over a century ago, horror films have always served as a way to draw out the most primitive emotion felt by all sentient creatures: fear. Throughout its lifespan, the horror genre has unconsciously served as a catalyst for equal representation of gender and race in films. From the creation of the Slasher subgenre by director Alfred Hitchcock in the 1960 masterpiece Psycho, the Final Girl Trope has been able to evolve and serve as a way for women to finally get the spotlight on the big screen, giving female actresses a way to show that they can, and frequently do, outshine men as the protagonist of a big budget film. The rise of prominent and well-known African-American actors has also seen an increase in equal race portrayal in horror, as well as in all genres. The widespread inclusion of black characters in speaking roles which actually survive to the end of the film and are revealed as the main protagonist is yet to be seen on an equal level with the actual viewing population demographic, as the majority of black characters are still killed off by the end of the film. In other regards, the film industry as a whole is still incredibly regressive, as the frequent and recent marginalization of Native American culture through the use of “Indian Burial Ground” stereotypes is incredibly damaging not only to Native peoples themselves, but to all Americans whose sole exposure to their culture comes from movies. The horror film genre has always used fear as a great equalizer for all its viewers, as anybody can experience the psychological thrill of a horror thriller regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, or age. While the genre is not perfect and has much more work to achieve true equal representation, horror movies will continue to be a leading player in the film industry in regards to equal representation of women and people of color.

Works Cited


The Severity of Silence

John R. Beranek

Silence has always been a form of communication for me. I use it as I would use a pen or pencil when writing. I believe that it adds to any story. Thinking back, I have always appreciated the silent moments in books and movies rather than the moments with dialogue. It always reveals something about a character much more than what they end up saying. I give the credit to my honed observational skills. I have always found comfort in silence and I agree with Susan Sontag when she said, “Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech.” I have always urged myself to wait before I spoke to find the right words, which in turn, would surprise some folk since I have been known to be wittier than others. Nonetheless, a more memorable moment in my life when I chose silence would have to be the day my father died.

My father was a brilliant man. He was smart and determined, cautious, yet also curious. He had this ability to take control of any situation and lead. He liked being in charge and drafting plans for whatever situation was at hand. He would have done anything for the people he loved, and he always did. He always seemed to know what someone should do and would advise them so. His death was a complete shock to our family and friends. He was a healthy 49-year-old and yet, he died of a heart attack. The artery that was 100% blocked is nicknamed the widow-maker for obvious reasons. The day he passed, he was on a business trip in Boston and the rest of the family was back home in Chicago. I was 16 years old at the time, a junior in high school.

When I got the news of the heart attack, I was alone, and I wasn’t sure what to do with myself. It was similar to one of those moments when you aren’t sure what you want to do because nothing feels interesting. Except in this situation, nothing felt real. Your mind is running through a hundred different scenarios, a hundred different unanswered questions, and a hundred different emotions. I knew only one thing in that moment and that was that I didn’t want to be alone. So, I walked to my neighbor’s house where they greeted me like they would any other day, like family. It was there that I sat for hours in my silence. She would reassure me every few minutes that he would be okay and that doctors these days are equipped to handle heart attacks much better (we did not know at this time that the artery was 100% blocked). I would listen and nod as a response to her comforting words. I appreciated them more than she may ever know.

I couldn’t find the right words to thank her then, and I still can’t now. It was such a strange and surreal moment that makes you question our whole existence as humans. In my silence, I sat and thought about how my life was going to be so different. Who was going to teach me to drive? Who was going to teach me to shave my face? Who was going to help me pick a college or area of study? I had watched my father help my three older brothers devise their life’s plan since I was eight years old and now it seemed
that I was left in the dust. We never got to have those heart-to-heart conversations about real life simply because I wasn’t there yet mentally. I was flooded with regret and anger and I knew that it would not have been wise to speak to anyone. It was best that they not feel the heat and depth of my anger and grief. It is now that I realize the power that silence can have. When you lose someone close to you, everyone is going to believe that they know what is best for you. They are going to try to show you or tell you how to grieve. They have good intentions no doubt, but what I learned to do through my silence was much more beneficial. I learned that silence is a way to take grief into your own hands and process it personally and on your own time. You may even feel closer to your father than ever before.
Hellish Dreams

John R. Beranek

Every night I approach the river dressed in white.
“Play the fitful tune,” I tell the moon.
Carried by a strong breeze, singing trees.
I wait for the ferryman.

Every night I pay the toll, in full.
“He likes when I come to visit,” I tell Charon.
His bones chatter, the flames scatter.
I wait for the golden gates.

“Every night I relive your death,” I tell my love.
My tearful eyes, silent his own cries.
Our hearts break, the sound shakes me awake.
I turn over in my sheets, waiting for peace.
Sungah Jung, watercolor
“What is a Man?**”

Kat Mamulashvili

Kee ping his head down, John walked along the crowded street with tears of anger and humiliation beading in his eyes. *Who does she think she is,* he thought, using the back of his hand to quickly but coolly dab away at a rogue tear scampering down his cheek. *She has no idea who she’s turning down! She’ll come to regret this day, and all the other days she turned me down.* Desperate to get away from the noise and rabble, John straightened his waistcoat and blindly pushed his way into a bar.

It was dark and quiet with a few beams of sunlight showcasing a fantastic dance of dust in the air. A tired barman stood, nodding obligingly, to the old man who sat at the counter. He was the only other customer, other than John, but his presence was quite enough to fill the entire room. He spoke boldly and loudly, gesturing theatrically, pointing forcefully, shaking his head knowingly. To anyone in the world it would seem that this old man was telling a brilliant and exciting story, but the barman looked as if he’d heard it all before. When he noticed John at the door, he nearly jumped.

“Pardon me!” he said all too cheerfully to the old man. John, thinking the old man was speaking to himself, remained silent. Another chuckle—this one louder and somehow more sure of itself—came from the old man. “She turned you down.”

“Beg your pardon?” John said, his forehead wrinkling and eyes squinting. “She turned you down,” he said. John, thinking the old man was speaking to himself, remained silent. Another chuckle—this one louder and somehow more sure of itself—came from the old man. “She turned you down.”

“Tell you what, son,” the barman said as he poured John his drink, “you spare me any of your tales and the drink will be on the house. I’ve had enough from the old man over there.”

“Deal,” John said before taking up the glass, “I’m in no mood to talk.” The barman, overjoyed at this, stepped out from behind the counter and started mopping the floors on the other end of the bar.

John stared into his glass, remembered an enraging slice of the conversation, and took a small albeit releasing sip.

*I never loved you, John,* a feminine voice snarled in his head (Rossetti line 5).

“Heartless wench,” John muttered to himself before bringing the glass to his mouth. *How dare she insult me so! And then as if it couldn’t get any worse, she offers to stay friends!* John polished off the drink. The old man chuckled from the other end of the counter.

“She turned you down,” he said. John, thinking the old man was speaking to himself, remained silent. Another chuckle—this one louder and somehow more sure of itself—came from the old man. This time John looked at him, and the old man repeated himself. “She turned you down.”

“Beg your pardon?” John said, his forehead wrinkling and eyes squinting.

“You heard me,” the old man said as he brought his own drink up to his mouth. He helped himself generously and then said it again. “Come on, son. You’re not fooling anyone. Least of all me! She turned you down!”

“That sounds more like a statement than a question,” John scoffed.
“That’s because it is. Only two types of men walk into a bar at 10 in the morning, order a whiskey, and grumble ‘heartless wench’ before finishing their drink: rejected men, or rejected alcoholic men.” John straightened his waistcoat. He was clearly dealing with a professional.

“How can you be so sure I’m not an alcoholic?”

“It takes one to know one, and you’re not one.” The old man motioned for John to sit nearer to him.

“I’d really prefer to be alone.”

“The youth of today has no respect for its elders,” the man said before inhaling sharply. “Very well! If Muhammad won’t come to the mountain, the mountain will come to Muhammad!” The old man pushed himself away from his seat, scuffled over to John, and plopped down with a heavy sigh. His breath was laced with rum and decay, and John had to call upon all his internal strength not to gag. “What’s your name, son?”

“John,” he admitted eventually.

“Go on then, John, what’s the story?”

“Well, John started slowly, “if you must know—”

“Of course I must!”

John pursed his lips in annoyance, both from the interruption and from the stench that seeped out again from the old man’s mouth. “I made a romantic offer—”

“You confessed undying love?”

“A gentleman would never be so direct!”

“Ah, so you’re a gentleman now?”

“Was it not obvious to begin with?”

“No. But do please continue, your Lordship.”

After a sharp exhale and fidgeting with the waistcoat, John started again. “I made a romantic offer—”

“Christ! You proposed?”

“Despite her having denied—”

“Denied? But how could any woman deny such a gentleman like yourself?” The old man laughed and playfully slapped John’s stern face. “How many times?”

“I had made a romantic offer twice—”

“Twice before? Heavens! The youth of today might be disrespectful, but they’re tenacious! I’ll give them that. Let me get this straight: she turned you down twice, but you asked again?”

“For the love of God, would you let me finish?”

John blurted before taking to silence. The old man also sat silently, studying John’s crimson face.

“But the third time wasn’t the charm, eh?” The old man asked after the silence grew unbearable.

“No,” John said, keeping his gaze to the counter, “it wasn’t, I’m afraid.”

“Well, that’s because you are one.”

“I do beg your pardon!” John gasped.

“The love of any man’s life should be the sea!”

“The sea? Don’t tell me you’re a sailor,” John ungentlemanly rolled his eyes. “That would explain the bad manners and even worse breath!”

The old man fell quiet once again, staring at John with a blank expression, who was beginning to feel he had crossed an ungentlemanly line. Just as he was about to work up an apology, the old man let out a wheezing cackle and playfully slapped John’s face once again.
“Bad manners!” the old man laughed. “Even worse breath!” He gripped his sides and wheezed heartily; he even wiped a shiny tear away. The last of the chuckles finally died, and when composure was restored, the old man continued with a wise expression settling on his face. “I married when I was young—about your age. Lovely woman, and I’ll love her ‘til the day I die. After all, I’m indebted to her with the lovely son she bore me. But I could only live in a facade for so long! I wasn’t unhappy, but I knew deep down this wasn’t the life I should be leading. Eventually, a war broke out, and I had to leave my family to fight” (Tennyson).

A tenderness came over the old man’s face as he moved his gaze past John. He was quiet for several moments, his eyes wrinkling sweetly and his chest rising and falling deeply. He was smiling softly at something he was seeing behind his aged, yet lively eyes.

“What happened?” John asked.

“It was the moment I had been waiting for without even knowing. The rush, the freedom, the adventure of leaving, sailing to a foreign land, commanding in battle, being on casual terms with death. It was war—there was nothing sweet or freeing in the blood and destruction—but I felt so…” the old man raised his hands to his chest, “…so pure” (Tennyson). “You have nothing, but therein lies the beauty. You don’t have a wife and son to disappoint. Go now, whilst you can! Get out and see the real world. You and I are not similar men. You’re young, you’re strong. You have more of a future than a past! I, well—” the old man laughed. “I remember the world when she was still in her youth. My bones are giving out, my muscles are running thin. I no longer plan my life by the months or years. I hope to make it to sundown. This woman, whoever she may be, is never going to be someone worth putting the world aside for. She didn’t turn you down three times; she let you run free three times! Go on, son. It’s not too late to seek a newer world” (Tennyson).
“It’s not that simple,” John protested.
“It is, actually. But that’s precisely why you’re afraid, isn’t it?”
“I’m not afraid!” John paused. “It’s just...what would people think?”

The old man laughed wittingly. “They’ll think, ‘My goodness! If only I were in his shoes! If only I had his youth and his strength! His liberty!’ The nastier the criticism, the more they’d wish they did what you’re doing,” John drummed his fingers on the counter. His father wouldn’t hear of anything more exotic than the summer trips to the countryside. A respectable gentleman stays put and stays respectable! John could hear his father shouting from his grave in an attempt to scare off the lure of the old man’s rambling.

“Say I’m interested, what would I do?”
“You’d follow me to the dock after buying me another drink, and we’d be off.”

“Where to?”
“Wherever we want to go!” The old man laughed as he waved over the barman. Their glasses were refilled and brought together in a toast.

“To your health,” John said.
“To hell with health! To good weather! Otherwise the sailing will be worse than any disease you can wish upon your enemy!” The old man slurped the drink and theatrically slammed the glass down. “Does this mean you’re coming?”

John still hadn’t taken to his drink yet. He was digesting the heavy words of the old man. He finally realized something, “I don’t know your name!”

“That’s going to stop you?”
“I can’t leave my life behind to be some vagabond if I don’t even know who to curse when all this goes tits up!”

The old man let out a jarring, ebullient laugh and slapped John in the face, who spilt his drink all over his waistcoat. When he saw John’s pale and stunned face, he started shrieking with laughter. He dug up a handkerchief from his pocket and offered it to John, breaking in and out of an apology and a chuckle. John slowly reached for the fabric and blotted away the alcohol. The heat of the day mixed with his waistcoat was already putting him in unknown territory. Now with a splash of alcohol, he was sure to stink like a drunken dog. He took a whiff of himself. Rum. The old man finally offered an answer to John’s question.

“Ulysses.”

“Very well, Ulysses,” John said, raising his empty glass, “to your health and good weather!” The old man slapped John on the back and laughed once more.

“Buy us another drink, John, so we can drink to that!”

*Based upon Tennyson’s “Ulysses” & Rossetti’s “No, Thank You, John.”

**Title is a reference to Hamlet’s famous, “What is a man / If his chief good...Be but to sleep and feed?–a beast, no more” (Hamlet 4.4.9.23-25)

Works Cited

Sauntering Down the Busy Street

Chris Pittman

Falling the One way Down
We felt things that we could not See
Sauntering Down the Busy Street.

We Began on a Beautiful day
White dress, Tuxedo sleek and clean
Starting Down the Busy Street.

Many people Began with Us
Riteful, Bright and Clean
A Little way Down the Busy Street.

Along the way we saw each Couple
Evolve and Disembark from the neat
Clogging the Side of the Busy Street.

We, however, Stayed arm and Arm
Interlocked with Tandem feet
Sauntering Down the Busy Street.

Along the Way our Appearance changed
But it never Bothered us, we stayed Vigilant and Keen
To the Hindrance of the Busy Street.

Couples Hailed cabs, for the Road, to Them
Was too Long and Wide to Walk and Be
So they Rushed down the Busy Street.

Not Us, no not Us, together We Stayed
Encoding the Terrible sights to see
Combined as we walked Down the Busy Street.

Along the way, people Lose so much
And Couples are few and far Between,
Halfway Down the Busy Street.

Widows Warmed their hands by the Fires
Along the Wall, For Courage they Plead
To Continue Down the Busy Street.

It’s an Arduous Journey to Overcome
One filled with Gripe, Sorrow, and Zeal.
Must we Walk, not Run, down the Busy Street?

Our Grip, I felt, grew Weak and Cold
As our walk Slowed Gray and Feeble
Nearing the End of the Busy Street.

The Light is Bright and Wonderful,
Warming our Hands and Staving our Sleep,
Down the Way on the Busy Street.

We came to an Abrupt Stop,
While our Grip Tore Apart.
My hand felt a Frigidness it had not known,
We Turned to Gaze back along that
Endless, Strenuous place we knew too well,
All the things we saw and smelled
And the end we could not Fathom.

We turned and Gazed into Our Eyes once more.
Knowing that we did it all in Chorus
We Smiled, Combined Our hands, and Evanesced.

Sauntering Down a Busy Street.
Letter to America

Za’Tozia Duffie

Do you see it?
My melan-ated skin? The curls in my hair?
Can you feel it?
The perplexed faces of those who stare?
Eyes, of those whose gaze seem to burn a hole in my face
Condolences, to mothers who’ll never feel their child’s embrace….

Do you hear me?
Yep, it’s another one of those speeches
Are you tired of it, yet?
Is this talk too serious? Too incriminating?
How ‘bout you put yourself in the shoes of those young black babies
Time is fleeting
No one is innocent of history
You cannot erase this trauma with a little “Would you please forgive me?”

So I guess the real question is, can you see me now?
Just because you claim to be color-blind does not reverse this hurt

Do you feel me?
I’m not an experiment or a person to practice your slang with

I have feelings and worth, you can try, but you can’t tame this
But that’s all right, take it personal if you wanna
Be the baddest and the coolest, is what I’m gunna
Be, I’ll be much more than you see
I’ll be able to one day look back and tell every other little queen

“Sweetheart, you can be me”
A Deeper Message in *WALL-E*

Stephen Kelley

In 2008 Disney Pixar released an extremely unique animated film which charmed audiences while pushing key issues into the public eye. Pixar Animation Studios’s *WALL-E* told the tale of a lovable robot who saved humanity from an eternity of mindless galactic pilgrimage, finally bringing them home to Earth with the help of the friends he found along the way. While the film’s shocking warnings about environmental concerns and unmitigated consumerism received widespread attention, a deeper message has gone widely undiscussed. While *WALL-E* clearly conveys humanitarian concerns, it also explores the duality of human nature and reveals an existential conflict critical to every element of the modern world. First, the film presents many of the good aspects of human nature in *WALL-E* as a character, who is defined by his innocence, curiosity, kindness, dedication, determination, creativity, and selflessness.

Though his job is to pick up trash, he works hard and joyfully makes the best of his circumstances. He is artistic, as shown by his appreciation for old movies and music, and he demonstrates a unique capacity for love in his relationship with the more advanced robot EVE. Throughout the film, *WALL-E* is continually shown to be out of his depth as he encounters technology far more advanced than he is, and despite his timid disposition, curiosity and conviction take turns pulling him forward. This is where he shows a distinctly human persistence, pursuing his interests despite the odds that are stacked against him. And at first he merely pursues EVE out of romantic interest, but after seeing EVE’s goal of bringing life back to Earth, he becomes devoted to a cause greater than himself. Not only are these qualities uniquely human, they are some of the positive traits that most strongly define humanity. By having this charming little robot show the audience each of these virtues, the film manages to evoke a sense of kinship for WALL-E as he struggles to keep up with the events in the world around him. The opportunity to relate to WALL-E in this way prepares the audience for the film’s deeper message about the importance of understanding nature. *WALL-E* juxtaposes humanity’s virtues against its shortcomings. The film’s antagonist is another robot, or more specifically, an artificial intelligence named AUTO (short for autopilot). Just as *WALL-E* embodies the strength and beauty of human nature, AUTO represents humanity’s flaws. AUTO steers the Axiom, the massive luxury space yacht that carries all remaining human life, and although he was created primarily to regulate the functions of travel, over the centuries of cruising, he has come to manage every aspect of the passengers’ daily life. His gradual accumulation of this control represents...

The film’s message is clear: if humanity chooses to sit down, to do nothing, to wait, then it will fall prey to its own harsher aspects. Every day calls each of us to repeatedly choose to do what is right, to again and again stand up rather than sit back and let things happen.
the natural tendency of individuals to seek power. And when AUTO tips the ship on its side to keep the protagonists from activating the Axiom’s recolonization protocol, he intentionally endangers every human on the ship, including the youngest children. This tells us that he is willing to cause thousands of deaths in order to reach his personal goal. By revealing this, AUTO demonstrates a ruthless capacity for cruelty that unfortunately presents itself throughout all of human history. Finally, AUTO signifies the reality of human imperfection. AUTO was programmed to prevent a return to Earth unless life was discovered on the planet once again, but he misinterpreted that directive to mean that he must prevent it at all costs. It is his fundamental mistake that leads him down that dark path, and it is his later mistake of underestimating humans that leads to his demise. By reminding the audience of the evils people are capable of, WALL-E paints a clearer picture of what humanity is truly battling every day.

Identifying what it means to be human is critical because a person’s perception of human nature forms their perception of many other issues, including political ideology, social attitude, and the core ideals about the way the world should be. WALL-E claims that the most vital conflict in existence is between the human race and its own nature. The humans in the film became victims of convenience and luxury, nearly costing them everything. But in the final battle for the fate of humanity, what saved them was the Captain finally learning to stand up and take control of his life. The film’s message is clear: if humanity chooses to sit down, to do nothing, to wait, then it will fall prey to its own harsher aspects. Every day calls each of us to repeatedly choose to do what is right, to again and again stand up rather than sit back and let things happen. Today, action is critical to making change and improving our world, so it’s up to each individual to stand up, and stand together. In the face of adversity or temptations, it is up to us to choose progress, to choose peace, to choose selflessness, and to choose a brighter tomorrow.
Station Road

Ciara White

No matter how hard Emerson willed Station Road to disappear, it was inescapable. It was the one place that he tried hard to forget, yet the memories kept bubbling to the top of his conscience, relentlessly awaiting confrontation. Emerson peered out the window of his carriage, gulping, as his Judgement Day crept closer and closer.

It had only been a year since his abrupt departure, but the town seemed to persist without his presence. His surroundings were jarringly similar: The only thing different was Emerson himself—his attitude, his attire, and his mentality. He hoped his return would be seamless, but even he knew that he was being naive.

And while Emerson was certain of his decision then, he only felt unsettled now. Unsettled by knowing that this still could have been his reality if he hadn’t left. Or by the guilt of living a luxurious life he didn’t deserve… or want. The lack of closure that came alongside leaving without saying any formal goodbye.

For a while, he considered Station Road his home. But he chose to leave.

The carriage finally dropped Emerson off, and, just standing there, he was overcome with emotions he couldn’t quite understand. He clenched his jaw, holding back the urge to cry.

It didn’t seem real, but he was back at Station Road. Emerson knew he owed a lot to his home. It led him to be the man he was now: the smart, calculated university scholar on his way to greatness. His connections introduced him to a world grander than he ever imagined. But—in hindsight—he almost wished that he would’ve thought over his decision to leave. Although his time at university was enlightening, he was susceptible to curiosity, and the questions were endless in their pestering.

He missed the simplicity of life when surrounded by loved ones. When surrounded by Rosie.

Rosie was the string that kept him tied here. At university, Emerson watched himself change. He became more concise, more composed. He traded his boyish charm for a level of sophistication. Rosie was the only person who could keep him grounded amongst his new success.

She was also the only person he truly wanted—no, needed—in his life.

They first met on Station Road. Emerson smiled as he remembered the encounter. The memory felt distant now, but he liked meeting up on the same street. It was a reminder of sorts. A reminder of all he gained and all he lost. All that he had yet to get back.

And even though they had gone their separate paths, Emerson hoped that Station Road—one street out of millions—would have the power to bring them back together after all this time.

Emerson whipped around, then stumbled back in shock, speechless. She was breathtaking. The
day was fading, but the remaining light illuminated her figure, highlighting her delicate features. Her smile shone brighter than Heaven's light, as if it was crafted by angels themselves.

The first thing that he said was, “I missed you, Rosie.”

She giggled warmly. He soon joined in laughing, letting go of all previous inhibitions.

Although he knew it was improper, he pulled her into an embrace. He couldn’t resist. Being in her arms was indescribable. His heart was more completely at peace. Safe from the demons that frequently haunted him. For the first time in a year, he felt happy.

Oddly enough, he felt like this was where he was meant to be. Not at some big, prestigious university, but here with her… on Station Road, the road that fostered—and answered—all of his desires and dreams. And, surprisingly, he was content with the idea of staying. At the end of the day, no matter how far he traveled, Station Road was his home.
Sarah Kamp, watercolor
The Final Beginning

Karen Moreno

The sails that had only moments ago nearly ripped from tornado like winds suddenly seized. The waters were calm, quiet and the sun filled the empty spaces with warmth again, impossibly so, dawn embraced us once again. After an eternal night, there hung limbs and tails from the mast up above. Was I bleeding, or perhaps it was another whose fate was not so fortunate. I quickly scanned my body; arms and legs, check, head, also check. My heavy armor once again saved me, priceless and beautiful, its everlasting worth deflected the death stained scales and talons of those ferocious monsters.

Their inhuman instinct could not bend my iron nor my will to live. I was born among the hungry and my unquenchable thirst for dominance knew no bounds. No sea monster nor soul could stop me achieving the treasures I was always destined to have. Soon the blood was mopped and the rotting, sticky flesh was thrown overboard. My armor was once again polished until its surface was as reflective as the sea around us.

The sea slept so peacefully; it was unnatural. Suddenly, a spine breaking sound crackled in my ears. I raced over to the edge of our ship. What I saw, staring back at me from the water, made me unsheathe my sword and point it directly towards my own heart. I sobbed as frantically as the child I abandoned the day I left shore. Suddenly, the ship stopped, a gong like sound came from what seemed to be a door the size and shape of our vessel in the middle of this stalking motionless sea. With no wind guiding the sails, the ship slid like a key into the unknown passage and I removed my blood-stained sword that was merely inches from my heart.

Inside this ship sized keyhole, there was nothing; I could see nothing nor anyone around me. The air was dense like hot syrup, but there was no smell; there was nothing besides the ship beneath my feet. Behind me I saw the door we came through slowly moving further away. I panicked as my eyes searched for light to find my armor; my most valuable possession must be found.

The last trace of light flickered away like the last breath of a flame. To my surprise, however, I was not consumed by the dark around me. I looked below to find that my ship was dropping with a steep sadness down to the never-ending bottom of this wall-less room I was in. I did not fall with the ship; I was now standing as I always was, wearing my armor, surrounded by nothing but this beautiful purple. I took a step forward and thankfully I didn’t meet the same plummeting fate as the ship. I took a few more steps, when out of nowhere, I was standing in front of a ladder that looked worn and somewhat lost. With no aim, I started to climb. I could not see the top nor where it led, but something was telling me to keep going.

Minutes maybe hours had gone by. My armor was weighing me down, but I felt the end was near. Relief overwhelmed me when I saw that above me was a hatch. I quickly lifted it open and white hot light blinded me. There was a soft roar followed by a calmness in the air. I climbed out of what I could only describe as an infinitely deep well and realized
I was in the middle of a street surrounded by a sky of swirling celestial spheres.

To my astonishment, I began to slowly acquire knowledge that allowed me to understand that which I had never seen or imagined before. The fast moving beasts that initially frightened me I now understood were vehicles, like the 1950s Thunderbirds and intergalactic spaceships, traveling at impossible velocities across the highway between time. Suddenly, a bright flashing neon sign settled in me an unparalleled feeling that I knew I must follow at all costs. Of the many impossible options before me, taxi by horse drawn carriage seemed the most nostalgic. As I sat in the carriage driven by a silhouette with an uncanny resemblance to a small child, I pondered my financial capabilities to pay the driver. I came to the quick conclusion that arriving at my destination was worth all my life’s possessions.

Upon arrival payment was due. Although I had great pride in my armor I relinquished it without a doubt along with my sword and boots, leaving behind that which fueled my unquenchable thirst. I heard the carriage trot away and I took a deep breath, the sweet smell of cosmos filled my nostrils, my bare feet felt the mossy ground and before me was a cobble path towards a worn-in country cottage. As I opened the cottage door, all else began to fade, leaving me in the presence of the one priceless moment I never knew I needed.
Shuchuan Chiang, watercolor;
I’m Going to be a Robot Doctor: The Lives of Childhood Identity

Anne Ahern

Cats have nine lives, Pac-Man has three, but youth has a thousand. When you are young, you are surrounded by adults who have a character. This man is the library man that does not like children; that woman is the lady who teaches you dance and wears fancy scarves. It seems, when you’re a child, that you are supposed to be a character. After all, nobody makes movies about the little girl that tried dance class but didn’t really like it. The identity of the person is always designated by their function, actions, capabilities and desires.

A problem arises then, when you have no cemented identity. Endless phases of trying to dictate your character and “person” are confusing because nobody you know that matters to the world seems to change as much as you do. Last summer, you liked race cars but this summer you’ve decided to become a firefighter, and so the validity of what you claimed as your identity is gone. However, there is a value to the transitory nature of youth-made phases in identity.

They are each their own life. You begin each life with a spark—something catches your eye, attracts your interest and invites you to learn more. You invest in this learning, settling into the cocoon of discovery, and eventually explode into a new (though possibly temporary) life. Anointing yourself into this new phase of identity, you are finally granted answers to the questions adults often ask you. What do you want to be when you grow up? Well that’s easy. This month, you are going to be an archaeologist.

Over and over, the incredible freedom of childhood offers allowance to reinvent personal attributes and desires. You don’t have to worry about college, job applications or your own personal capabilities because you’re 11. Youth, granting you the infinite lives of formation of identity, doesn’t ask you your SAT score or if you’re eligible for a loan. All youth cares about is jumping from one experience to the next. Where this becomes disadvantageous, however, is when it comes to an end.

At some point, the childlike identity alterations reach their end. Suddenly, it seems, you’re barred from creating new lives to explore. Instead, you’re told, you must confront everything in yourself and supply a final answer and choice. Who are you? Which college are you going to go to? What are you going to be? Which character have you chosen? Reinvention of self becomes taboo, a feat accomplished only after a monumental failure or breakdown. This week, you’re not allowed to be a robot doctor or an archeologist; you have to continue being who you chose at the end of high school or be crushed by the silent judgment of others and financial burden of changing direction. This suffocating, difficult to
comprehend, socially reinforced box will eventually become comfortable though. You’ll settle down, accept your identity, and turn into the characters children see in their lives. However, I believe there’s a way to break free.

You don’t need Thor’s hammer to break the walls of the identity box. All you need to do is maintain imagination. I’ve decided not to let my daydream wanderings of childhood fade. Instead, I’ve turned them into self-expression and improvement of character. I might not be able to tell the people I talk to I want to be a space princess anymore without getting recommended to a medical professional, but I can learn how to be an ally for a different race, develop a deeper capacity for love and patience, and learn how to install tile. I am not confined to my identity; I am not a single life. To continue to develop aspects of self and add to identity is to live a thousand lives.
My Dream Car

Aidan Caras

I had a mission in middle school to get a job. That job would grant me so many things I wanted that I couldn’t get without money. So at the age of 14, I set out to get my first job. I didn’t know how hard it would be to get a job because of my age, which would require a work permit, and my job search took time and effort. With the help of my loving parents, I finally got a job at really the only place a person my age could get. All the jokes I made about working at McDonald’s, and there I was working at the McDonald’s right by Great America. After many 40-hour work weeks over the summer, customers yelling at me, becoming a crew trainer, flipping burgers, and paycheck after paycheck, I finally saved up to get a car. This car wasn’t just a car—it was my car.

Funny enough, where most teen boys my age have a dream car in mind, I didn’t really have one when I set out on this mission. I wasn’t looking for something crazy amazing since I really only saved up so much. It became a journey, going from car dealership to car dealership to find the car. I did not like this experience at all since I had really no idea what I was looking for, and the car salesmen weren’t exactly the nicest of people. They made me feel like every car that they showed me was going to be “The Car” for me. As you might guess, many of the cars the salesmen showed me were not actually “for me” at all. Nothing to dislike about certain cars, but at one point a salesman brought out a 1998 Saab 900 that was not at all in good condition, and the only cool thing about it was the cup holder. For some reason I thought the search would be easy, though it honestly felt just as long and trying as it was to get my job and save up enough money. But then, the salesman finally brought me out to meet “My Car.”

To be honest, I had never heard of or seen this model of car in my whole life, nor did it really catch my eye at first. It didn’t help that the paint was chipped or just gone in certain areas of the car, along with the occasional rust spots and the single but noticeable small rock dent in the rear. I wasn’t fully put off by the car like the other ones he showed me, so the salesman really pushed me to go for a test drive. I wasn’t convinced, but went with his suggestion. That’s when things got a little better and a little worse. The brakes were definitely worn. My foot pressed hard on the brake pedal, which had to pretty much hit the floor of the car to get the car to stop. My hands vibrated from holding the steering wheel, which had a constant shake while driving or in park. Though the car did have power windows, which was nice, some of the switches on the console didn’t function well, and sometimes the windows wouldn’t open despite my pressing on the switches. The plastic hub caps with the worn paint didn’t make the car look any better. The sound of a bad belt squealing in under the hood didn’t make the car sound better, either. But I loved it. It was my car.
All that time and effort—I finally had a car to call my own. I proudly paid for the car in full with my own hard-earned money, paid for the tags, and paid for the car insurance. The only thing I couldn’t do myself was to sign the paperwork since I was still a minor. But besides that, I became the proud owner of a 2006 Hyundai Elantra; it was mine and mine only. I drove her home; quite honestly, I haven’t felt anything better than the feeling I had just driving my own car back home by myself. It was St. Patrick’s Day, and the symbolism wasn’t lost on me—I had the luck of the Irish!

The love for my car only grew more the day after the big purchase. No less than 24 hours after buying my car, the check engine light shown bright on the dashboard. I didn’t intend for this—I didn’t set out to do it—but I got myself a project car. The excitement was still running through me that this was my car, so I wanted to figure out what was wrong on my own. I drove her to AutoZone, and the employee used a device that can troubleshoot why the light came on. The device produced a code that suggested I needed to replace a part, which I thought I could do on my own. So, $40 spent and five days later, the part arrived and I replaced it. The check engine light hasn’t come back since.

I wanted to kit my car out so that I would be prepared for anything. Get stuck in the snow? I kept a shovel in my trunk. Battery died? I had jumper cables. Zip ties, a first aid kit, sleeping bag, emergency glass breaker/seat belt cutter combo—have most everything you could think of in my car. While most boys my age wouldn’t be caught dead driving a car like this, I couldn’t be prouder or more in love. The average person just sees a beater car driving by, but to me it’s my car that’s ready for anything.
The Very Hungry Caterpillar: How I Became a Butterfly

Stephanie Cave

I was very young when I read The Very Hungry Caterpillar, perhaps six or seven. I was late to start reading because no one at home taught me how to. My dad tried, but he wasn’t home often so I didn’t practice much. It wasn’t until my school put me into a reading program that I actually learned quite quickly and became quite good at it as well. Nonetheless, one of my favorite books was The Very Hungry Caterpillar, which my dad gave to me as a gift for learning how to read. He gave me a lot of books for that reason, but The Very Hungry Caterpillar meant the most to me.

I spent a lot of time alone and unsupervised as a child. My mother had painted me a beautiful playroom in our basement, with the walls painted blue like the sky and little white clouds swimming in its hue, but seldom did she ever actually play with me in there. My mother was one of appearances—she’d build my dollhouse and dress me in furs and jewels to play the part of her doll, but I never really felt like she liked me. My dad traveled a lot for work, and when he was home he gave most of his attention to me, which would make my mom jealous. I knew she was jealous because she made no attempt at hiding her disdain for me and how much time my dad spent with me. So, when I read The Very Hungry Caterpillar, it was a book my dad bought for me and a book I read alone under the blue sky of my playroom.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar is about a small caterpillar that hatches alone on a leaf and proceeds to eat any food he comes across. He eats so much that he grows quite large, and he hides away in a cocoon until he blossoms into a big, beautiful butterfly. The illustrations are bright and almost abstract, which appealed to me as a child. The pages are fun as well, with flaps for foods the caterpillar ate on different days of the week. It was a book that easily got my attention as a child for its colorful illustrations and interactive quality. Since it was new, I remember it having that distinct “new book” smell—like the scent of a library, basically. The cover and spine were smooth to the touch, and I re-read it quite frequently.

I liked that The Very Hungry Caterpillar had no parents. He always seemed kind of lonely to me, which resonated with me at the time, since that was how I felt.

When I was seven I began to develop a habit of emotional eating, and by eight years old I had gotten bigger. My mom noticed this, as well as noticing my insecurity and sensitivity about it, and began to verbally insult me. I was no longer her
perfect doll in her dollhouse, and I think that—coupled with the jealousy and disdain she had for me already—is what fueled her taunting. Every time I ate something, I thought about how the hungry caterpillar ate through all his food. It wasn’t my intention to be like him in this way, nor had I thought that eating would turn me into a beautiful butterfly, but I still had the hope that maybe one day that would be me.

Every time I did something wrong, and it could be as trivial as getting my pants dirty from playing in the backyard, my mother would hurl insults at me. “This is why no one likes you,” she’d say. “Ugly,” she’d call me. “Fat,” she’d describe. It was because of her that I made the association of worth with beauty, and I longed for the day that I became a beautiful butterfly like the hungry caterpillar. In a way, it gave me hope. I fantasized about the idea of being able to grow wings and fly away as the butterfly could do. There were instances when I contemplated running away, but I never did. I was always so afraid of what my mother would do when she was angry, and on top of that, I didn’t want to make my dad sad or upset. So, I never grew my wings and flew away. Each day of the week I ate more food, sat quietly through my mother’s growing insults, and waited for the day I’d become a beautiful butterfly. Maybe then she’d like me.

That day didn’t come for a long time. By high school my parents had finally separated and I got to live with my dad. Still, the aftermath of my mother’s behavior left me with more extra weight than I wanted and a damaged self-esteem. By the end of my senior year I had eaten through all I could as a hungry caterpillar, and I was around 220 pounds. That summer, and through my first year of college, I decided to go into my cocoon. I worked hard to lose the weight by implementing strict meal plans, and by my second year I had gotten down to 140 pounds. There was a weird shift in the way that people viewed me and treated me after that. I never really got hit on and I never had a boyfriend, but by the time I was done losing weight it all suddenly happened. I got into my first relationship and began being approached in public quite often. Although I didn’t personally think I was that beautiful, nor do I even think that now, I know I became a beautiful butterfly to everyone else, at the very least.

Additionally, my mother is weirdly nice to me now. The last time I saw her she complimented numerous features of mine like my hair and my clothing. She called me beautiful repeatedly, which reinforced what I had thought as a child. This idea that if I became a beautiful butterfly like the caterpillar, my mother would finally be kind to me—it was no longer an idea, it was true. I think that hurt the most.

I think about the four blue walls of my playroom and The Very Hungry Caterpillar quite often. There were no other children’s books that stood out to me in this way or meant so much to me. Of course there are books I recall from my
childhood because of reading them in school, like
Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! and Brown Bear,
Brown Bear, What Do You See? But The Very Hungry
Caterpillar helped shape me as a reader and is
likely the reason I tend to form such close bonds
with fictional characters. Whether it be in a book,
TV show or movie, I'm always the first to form
an emotional bond with one of the characters. I
attribute this to forming a bond with the caterpillar
when I was so young. Anytime there is someone
I can relate to in a form of media, it's as if there
is a piece of myself in them, and I want them to
succeed and be happy. Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the
Bus! and Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?
were cute books with captivating illustrations, but
they didn’t have the substance that The Very Hungry
Caterpillar had for me, even if its substance was
only the meaning my childhood self-attached to it.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar is such a simple
book, with such a simple story, yet it meant the
world to me as a child. It was a simple tale that
helped me get through some of the most damaging
and traumatic parts of my life, and I'll always be
thankful for that little caterpillar and his ability to
triumph and become a beautiful butterfly.
Left and Right

Maria Alberto

Cranberry Street, where one side was always colder than the other and no kid ever bothered to accidentally lose their soccer ball to the left side. I’ve watched how the sun was selective. The taller the house, the more the sun reflected. The rest of us sat on old couches in the dark watching the rain prefer us. The rain loved us so much it created a hole in the roof, where the living room stood, that would drip straight to our heads and sometimes to our shoulders. We contained and treasured the gift in buckets to later be spread to our loving garden where my mother bloomed a piece of herself. A small garden surrounded by a wired fence that leaned backward and warned us not to touch it. If you did, the wire would fight back by reminding you about the imprisonment of your thoughts. Most of the white tulips, marigolds, and bellflowers surrounded two old trees with leaves barely holding on. However, no sunlight made it difficult to keep her creations alive and vibrant. The flower petals created a splat of paint on the dried-up grass as they died one by one each day. My mother viewed it as a painting on a canvas. My mother would even say we had our own *Starry Night* with how the petals mixed with the mud from the rain.

The roofs of the houses divided us as a community. The sun became unfair as it shined on rooftops with various shapes, from flat surfaces to triangular shapes as chimneys rose upwards. The rest of us, with a flat roof and no chimney, stayed in the dark. Although we all had dark gray roofs, ours became lighter as the paint blistered and cracked, leaving curling shingles behind. The light gray sidewalk always complemented the exterior bricks the right side houses owned. We used to have a white exterior until it began to turn rotten due to the amount of rain and dirt. My dad, in an attempt to create his art, bought the cheapest paint he could find. Now my house is red, more noticeable than the other rundown houses that frowned in their dull shadows. I often wondered if that was enough to dream bigger than my side ever could.

Now my house is red, more noticeable than the other rundown houses that frowned in their dull shadows. I often wondered if that was enough to dream bigger than my side ever could.

I grew up on the corner of the street where snow would never melt and the wind blew our hair slightly to the left. My dad and I would always shovel snow into a large pile. This is where I created my own sledding entertainment, in front of a red house that eyes captured with pity. It didn’t matter if summer was over; we never had a chance to experience the sun kissing our skin for warmth and growth. And if we did, it was brief and distant as we passed by. On the other side, the children my age had all types of toys: their own swing set and slide (while my old, badly torn sneakers had to walk at least two miles to reach a playground), their own basketball nets, and all types of sports balls that mocked my poor excuse of a soccer ball. A ball that had panels falling off at random times until it was left with nothing more than just torn up lining covered in dirt. However, they played stiffly as eyes from their bay and bow windows watched them closely. As much as I wanted to go out to play with them, their bright clothes made my rags unique. The only
clothing that could compare was strictly used for church or parties.

My father always told my mother and me how one day he was going to buy a better house. A house with two stories not just one, a house with an attic where all our unnecessary belongings could be stored, a house that would help our hearts grow. As I waited for *one day* to occur, I watched the night fall upon us. The street lights were brighter on the right side. We stayed in the dark with only one lamppost, which flickered often, standing in front of a corner that separated us. We couldn’t have our porch lights on because my dad said it was a waste of money. So, most nights animals made strange noises and the branches of the trees scratched my already cracked window. I already heard enough noises from my mom struggling to shut most of the doors in the house, echoing behind the cries of a squeaky door. Sometimes it reminded me of a guinea pig crying out for food. Seeing the pile of junk that stood in one corner of my room didn’t help me either. Most were old belongings like a CD player and a DVD player. They reminded my parents of a simple life where things were different. The moon became my comfort when the moonlight shut my eyes to a peaceful sleep. The stars more visible on our side, for once, gave me hope that one day the sun would shine on us. One day, I’ll have to worry about being sunburned and not about the dead flowers or the messy, red paint. All the brightness in a dark sky becoming my witness as I dream. As of now, I keep closing my eyes shut with illustrations, my chest aching for one day to visit me soon. A day to feel and be seen as equal to everyone else.
The Sorrow of Oak Street

John R. Beranek

I never thought I would be able to convince myself to go back there. But there I was taking the turn down Oak Street. I would have gladly waited another fifteen years before I showed my face, but I needed to visit my old childhood friend Benji Carrloni, who I had heard was really sick at the time. His ma’s house was the first one on the right of the short and narrow street. I recognized it because it had the ugliest rooster mailbox that wasn’t there when I left at 16. When I pulled up, there was a doctor walking out of the house, so I stopped him before he could get into his car: “What’s the diagnosis Doc?” I yelled as I lit a cigarette. He responded with a bunch of fancy words to describe my Benji’s condition. The words I did recognize, however, were “drinking” and “excessive.” I wasn’t surprised, but I just nodded and pretended to act sad and disappointed. Frankly, the only part that surprised me was how long Benji had avoided this. He started with the hard stuff back in middle school and never really stopped. Mix that with explosives, dirt biking, whatever other shit he’d been doing, and I’d bet my last dollar that he’d end up right where he was.

“He responded with a bunch of fancy words to describe my Benji’s condition. The words I did recognize, however, were “drinking” and “excessive.” I wasn’t surprised, but I just nodded and pretended to act sad and disappointed. Frankly, the only part that surprised me was how long Benji had avoided this. He started with the hard stuff back in middle school and never really stopped. Mix that with explosives, dirt biking, whatever other shit he’d been doing, and I’d bet my last dollar that he’d end up right where he was.

“He responded with a bunch of fancy words to describe my Benji’s condition. The words I did recognize, however, were “drinking” and “excessive.” I wasn’t surprised, but I just nodded and pretended to act sad and disappointed.

“Poor kid,” the doctor said shaking his head while looking back at the old house. “May God have mercy on him.” I pulled another drag from my cigarette and nodded in agreement.

While I finished my cigarette, I watched the doctor drive away when he suddenly swerved to the right to avoid a collision; tires screeched, horns blared, and unpleasantries were shouted, all while I chuckled to myself. They were supposed to put a stop sign at the intersection of Oak and 85, but I guess they never bothered. “Figures.” I threw my cigarette butt into the street and shoved my cold hands into my pockets. I turned around and saw my own childhood home further down Oak. It was still the ugliest house on the whole damn street. Not that there were many to compete with since there were only five houses, all of which were pretty ugly in their own right. But as I walked down Oak and towards my old home, it was clear that none compared to the shit-box my father claimed was my inheritance since we moved there.

As I walked down the street, I passed the other houses one by one and remembered my friends that used to occupy them. It was Benji, Frankie, Jamie, Alex, and me. The five of us were inseparable growing up. We would ride our bikes up and down Oak Street like we were on patrol or something. But I was closest with Benji out of the group. He would always have some stupid idea that he said would “test the limits.” That’s how he lived his life when we were growing up, always wanted to push the boundaries of what we could do before we got into trouble. And it was me that usually got the worst of it since I had a father in the military and Benji had only his ma around. She would still smack him if he cursed or went too far with a joke, but he was everything to her. I called her Ms. Carrloni.
which she never liked and would tell me to call her Ma as well, which I would respond with, “Okay, Ms. Carrloni” and we would laugh.

I couldn’t tell you who the hell lived on Oak Street now besides Benji and his mom. It seemed like all the other houses were empty. I had never heard Oak so silent in my life. Maybe since my last memory of that place was when Benji and I let some fireworks go off on Mrs. Mackenzie’s front porch. I guess that was my father’s limit since he sent me away to military school after that. I passed the old lady’s house as that memory played in my mind. I figured she was long dead by then since her breakfast used to be half a cigarette and two bloody marys. She lived right next-door to me and always complained to my father about how undisciplined we all were. I hated that old witch.

I approached my old driveway and took comfort in how shitty the house looked. The driveway filled with cracks and weeds, flowerbeds filled with dead plants and weeds of their own, the dark brown siding turned into a brownish yellow with vines that completely covered one side, and the red shutter boards were all gone except for one. I walked up the front porch steps and peered through the door window. The house was empty, so I tried to open the door; but it was locked. I didn’t understand why, but in that moment, the door being locked really pissed me off, so I elbowed the window ‘til it shattered and unlocked the door. I had to use my shoulder a couple times to get the door to open. I took a few steps inside and took a deep breath. I expected it to smell different. Perhaps musky or old, but it smelled the exact same. I stood there for a while and soaked it all in. I remembered how my mother screamed at my father while he pushed me out the door with my duffle bag. I remembered walking towards the car that came to pick me up for military school, before I turned around and told my father how much I hated him and that I hoped I’d never see him again. It was two weeks later that my folks died in a car wreck, followed by the promise of a new stop sign at the intersection of Oak and 85.

I closed the door and tried to silence all the thoughts. I lit another cigarette and walked up the street back towards Benji’s house. It started getting dark, and I laughed to myself again as the streetlights didn’t turn on next to Benji’s house. I knocked on the front door and Ms. Carrloni opened it. “Can I help you?” she asked me innocently. I looked up from my shoes and I could tell that she recognized me immediately, and I saw the smile grow across her face and the tears that welled in her eyes. I regretted knocking on the door, but it was too late at that point. “Good evening, Ms.—” was all I got out before my words froze in my throat and I looked back down at my shoes. She put her soft, kind hand on my cold, rough cheek, and I started to cry.

I remembered walking towards the car that came to pick me up for military school, before I turned around and told my father how much I hated him and that I hoped I’d never see him again.
Jim Morgan, ceramics
The Barn

Aubrey Mochlenpah

In the dark, a tall dark mare stood, a patch of white on her forehead. Her eyes opened as she was awakened by the cluck of the chickens, her ears swiveled, hearing every creak and sound of the other animals rustling in the barn. In the dark, her eyes rested on her newborn, a colt, days old, resting in the hay. She looked at him with such adoration. The colt awoke, wobbling underneath his mother to suckle. She nuzzled him, and he let out a squeal of delight. Her ears flickered, her superior hearing able to pick up one pair of footsteps approaching.

A human with a youthful face and ruffled brown hair appeared. His clothes were worn flaked with dried mud. He appeared in her sights around the freshly painted barn stall. He was hauling a stack of hay on his back. The mare had heard his name before, Alexander, was it? He was her caretaker now. The human looked on with a sorrowful look, burying himself in his work, filling the feed bucket with stale hay. The hay’s usual earthy green color was yellow today. The horse let out a pleading whinny and snort, so used to her luxurious lifestyle with various legumes. The human said, “Sorry girl, That’s all we can afford right now.” She hoofed the floor, but quietly resigned herself to eating. She couldn’t understand their language, not yet. But she understood their tone. One of loss and sadness.

She couldn’t understand their language, not yet. But she understood their tone. One of loss and sadness.
The manchild continued, “Ma, it’s us or the horses. We’ve already sold the others and it’s not enough. And we don’t even have enough food for both of them. I mean, just look at her.” He gestured to the mare’s shaking, ill, and malnourished form.

She pointed her finger in his face, “Don’t you dare; your father loved that horse.”

Alexander looked down, sullen, “That’s not the only thing. There’s something else...” he continued, “…I got a letter.” The mare lowered her head. “…I’m being drafted.” The mare faintly heard weeping, but her ears flickered and her feet shook, catching fewer words as time went on.

The weeping settled down and she heard, “Alexander, you promise me you’ll come back.” The mare closed her eyes and shuttered, breathing heavily, lowering herself. What she missed was the lingering gaze of the woman who grudgingly and eventually gave a nod to her son. The son walked away. The woman, blonde hair falling across a stress-wrinkled face, walked over and knelt in the stall stroking the mare’s nose, “I’m sorry, young one. It’s hard losing someone.” She petted the horse, “I hope you can forgive me.” Her voice faded into the night as did all the other animals being loaded into crates.

The barn was silent when the mare woke. She blinked, blurriness gone. She looked in the straw and her child was nowhere to be seen. She snorted loudly, pulling herself up. Her hooves bending the straw, she searched everywhere in her tiny stall. She stomped and whinnied ferociously.

Someone had taken her child. She had hoped it was just a fever dream, a trick. She panicked. When she looked around her stall, it became apparent that her child was gone. Her feed bucket was full, but she didn’t care. She rampaged and destroyed it kicking her back hooves; it broke in half and spilled all over the floor. It wasn’t important. Nothing mattered to her anymore. The barn echoed with her rearing and frustrated neighing. She yanked on the lead tied to the bars and it snapped. She called for her baby, a desperate whinny, kicking the broken barn doors in. Her lumbering form kicked into the wood, and it cracked under pressure. She was blinded by rage, calling out for her child, a desperate groan, but there was no answer. Half the stall collapsed on her, and she fell to the ground with a whinny and exhaustion taking over. She closed her eyes.

As the days passed, her legs cramped and shook from being chained in the stable stall. She was moved to the stall across from her usual one. The emptiness and echoing haunted her. Her paradise was now becoming a house of horrors. She lost everything, but the woman was the only one she saw now. She hadn’t seen the manchild or the old man in a very long time. Her coat was now peppered with gray, matching the woman’s once blonde locks.

The woman visited her daily now, telling stories and singing hymns, “You remind me of myself, young one.” Stroking the mare’s forehead, she continued, “You remind me of myself sometimes, a single mother, a widow.”
She took a deep breath, looking forlorn. “Now I’ve even lost my son. Metaphorically, though. He’s still out there somewhere, but I’ll probably never see him again.” She sighed and scratched the mare’s ear. “I’m sure you can relate.”

The horse still could not understand their language, but she recognized the tone and let out an agreeing whinny, one of loss and emptiness. They sat there alone for a while in the dark and peeling paint of the barn, now alone, singing quietly for all that they’d lost.
Laura Tumminello, ceramics (left)
Anne Bernard-Pattis, ceramics (right)
A Childhood Memory: The Hills Laugh Too

Aubrey Mochlenpah

Past the beach
I’m running. Giggling.
Behind me, waves breach
My towel held close around me,
A comforting weight.

Whispering hills greet me
As far as the eye can see.
Hills of luscious green grass await me.
My towel drags, too large for my body.

My foot missteps. I trip.
Rolling, I land at the bottom.
Cries of delight
Reach my ears
For they are mine.

Buzzing energy fills the atmosphere
Like for a moment, the hills themselves are
laughing too.
I lay there, my laughter dying down.
I inhale the hill’s sweet scent.
I begin to run again, giggling.
Do you believe in fate?

It was the summer after I met her when she asked such a ridiculous question. We were lying on her roof, watching the stars and hoping her parents wouldn’t figure out we snuck through her dad’s office window to get up there.

At the time, I thought she was joking, so I merely laughed in response. She smiled along at my reaction and never asked me that again. Maybe I should have considered it a bit more, or at the very least, considered it in the first place. For all I know, it was fate from the beginning.

We both happened to be in the right place at the right time when we met. I snuck out one night to spend time alone at the park, and she had left her home because she was having a bad night. She was already there by the time I arrived, hiding in the tunnel where you could look up and see the stars through a plastic covering. It was where I always liked to go.

I walked up the playground steps and kneeled down to crawl in when I realized she was there. For a second, I admit, I got scared and considered running away, but that fear eased after I realized it was just another girl around my age. Her long, dark hair was tangled, her eyes were swollen from crying and she had eyeliner running down her cheeks.

I realized I had been staring when she shook her head expectantly. Anxiety driven, I stumbled for words and ended up saying, “Um… Hey?”

It was the weirdest hello I’ve ever given in my entire life.

“Yeah, hey,” she answered back, a bit defensively. After a few awkward seconds, I pointed over my shoulder, “Should I just go?”

She turned back to stare at the sky, considered for a second, then told me, “You can do whatever you want.”

I almost took that as a yes. There were times I wished I had. If I just left I could have forgotten about her in a week or two. It definitely would have been easier; that’s for sure.

After a moment’s hesitation, I crawled in and sat a foot away from her. She didn’t give me a second glance as I leaned back and stared at the sky with her. I’m not sure how much time passed before I spoke up.

“You good?”

Even to this day, I beat myself up over how awkward it was.

She let out a humorless laugh, “Are you good?” “I’m not the one who’s crying alone in a tube.”

She finally looked at me then, gave a pointed look to my bare shoulder, and glanced back up. I remember biting my tongue and silently cursing myself before turning my attention back to the sky.

“I didn’t expect to run into anyone.” I said it as if it were an explanation. Back then I never wore sleeveless shirts unless it was to wear for bed. Even changing in the high school locker rooms was either getting there before everyone else or strategically hiding the slashes on my shoulder with the lockers.
“That makes two of us.” She turned back to stare into the night sky with me. A few more minutes passed when she asked, “So, your world sucks, too?”

“In some ways,” I responded.

A few more minutes of uncomfortable silence passed between us before we slowly began to actually talk. Before I knew it, we were spilling our guts out to each other. She talked about why she was there, telling me about what a shit dad she had. I opened up to her about what the slashes on my arm were all about. Next thing I knew, we were laughing with each other and dissing the universe together. I’ve never gotten along with someone so quickly.

Since that night, it became our thing to sit under the stars and talk about the universe and ourselves. On her roof, under those stars, she asked if I believed in fate. Was our meeting fated?

No. Our meeting was just a coincidence. We just so happened to cross each other’s path.

I got her number before we decided to go home, and I texted her after I managed to silently sneak my way back into the house. She quickly replied and before I fell asleep for the night, we had already made plans to see each other again.

In a few months, I had gotten to know her, her brother, Darren, and three of her cousins. The six of us became our own little family, always spending our free time together, escaping our shitty lives and living as if the world held only us.

In those moments, when it was just the six of us, everything felt perfect.

We often hung out in the basement at her place. We always threw makeshift parties, blasted music, sang horrendously, and turned on cheap strobe lights. When we weren’t doing that, we played with the air hockey table, raided the small bar, and watched movies or children’s shows to make fun of them.

At one point, her youngest cousin, Juliet, told me that they never really talked to each other before. That’s when I learned that she and Darren moved around a lot and never stayed in one place for too long. Every few years their dad made them move back to the neighborhood, but other than that, they were complete strangers.

Maybe I should have taken that as a hint to not get too close. Not that it would have made a difference at that point.

One night we were all crammed on the couch watching Annabelle in the dark. Darren and their adopted cousin, Wesley, fell asleep within the first twenty minutes, leaving only four of us actually watching. At one part, about halfway through, there was a jump scare that had her cling onto my arm, which scared me more than the actual jump scare did.

“Sorry.” She whispered with a small, embarrassed smile.

I smiled back and shook my head, “All good.”

She loosened her grip but kept her hand on my forearm. I couldn’t focus on the movie after that. All I could think about was her hand, just inches away from being intertwined with mine and wondered if I should just close that distance myself. Then I wondered if it was wrong.

When the movie was over, we woke up Darren and Wes. We poked and prodded saying they had missed out and they were grumpy that we woke them up. Times like that, it felt like we were a real family. Times like that, I was able to look around and be overwhelmingly happy.
Do you believe in fate? I laughed at her question.
No, I don’t think so, but no one really knows for sure, right?

One winter night we were walking by one of the parks near her house. Everything was covered in snow and the ponds were frozen over. We got bored of walking and started throwing big rocks onto the ice trying to break it. After a few failed tries, she looked at me and smiled.

“Think we can walk on it?”
She stepped onto the ice and I pulled her back, “I don’t think that’s smart.”
She shook her head, “It’s fine, C.”
When she took another step, I didn’t stop her.
Another and the ice creaked below her. She glanced at me and I shook my head, but she took another step. Another:
The ice broke below her.
I screamed her name and my dumbass ran in after her.
Luckily, all the ice shattered from where she was to the shore, and I was able to just run in and drag her out. We were lucky it wasn’t deeper and that she hadn’t gone further out.

We sat on the ground for a minute, shivering. She was almost completely soaked from falling in, and my legs were wet and freezing from running in after her.
Panicked and infuriated, I threw snow on her, yelling, “What’s wrong with you?”
“Oh, calm down, C,” she complained, brushing the snow off. “We’re fine.”
“That was stupid,” I hissed back.
She pushed herself off the ground and offered me a hand that I refused. She rolled her eyes when I stood up without taking it.
“Let’s just go home. You can borrow some of my clothes.” She began to walk away.
I yelled her name. “That could have been so much worse!”
She sighed as if it were nothing. “Can we do this at home? I’m beginning to ice over.”
“Are you kidding me?” I threw my arms up in frustration. “What if you died—people die by doing shit like that! What would I have done?”
She laughed, “Well you ran in, so I guess you’d die with me.”
It was a joke to her. Something to brush off and laugh at.
I was ready to argue more when she walked up to me and placed her hands on my shoulders. With a squeeze she told me, “I don’t plan on leaving you anytime soon, C. Now let’s go home before they have to cut our toes off.”
I wasn’t thinking when I asked, “You promise?”
She paused. Blinked at me for a moment. Then smiled. “I’ll always be here, C. No matter what happens, I’m with you. Always.”
I nodded, finally calming down and catching my breath, and promised right back, “Yeah, me too. Forever.”

Even though we were both freezing, it was the warmest my heart had ever felt.

A few months after that, she asked me if I believed in fate. I regret laughing.
on her door immediately after, saying they heard the yelling. I’ll never forget the way Darren looked over his sister to make sure she was really okay, then how he did the same for me. Carter called Juliet and Wes, and when they came over, we went down to the basement to drink and blast music—anything to forget about the rest of the world. Anything to make it feel as if it were only us.

A month after that she was gone. Ran away from home with her mother without a word to any of us. A clean break. One day she was there, the six of us, together like we always should have been. Then the next day, it all began to shatter.

“Why did you stay?” I asked her brother when I found out.

“To make sure Dad doesn’t try to find them.” He sighed and downed the flask he normally kept hidden in his room. “Besides, graduation is in a week. I’ll be eighteen in a couple months. I plan on leaving then.”

“To go with them?” My voice broke when I asked.

“I have no idea where they’re going.” He admitted. “In case this gets escalated, which it probably will, I don’t want to know.”

I nodded and couldn’t find any words to say after. I just sat with him, silently crying on his front porch until the sun went down and the stars came out. In that moment, I really wanted to know what her answer would have been.

Graduation came and went for Darren, Carter, and Wes. A month after, Wes found and wanted to meet his birth mom. When he did, he decided to stay in New York and go to university there. Another month later, just like he said, Darren turned eighteen and left in a similar fashion with Carter. No goodbye from either of them, just a clean break. It wasn’t all that surprising that they left together. They were truly brothers to the end. And by the time next school year started, Juliet had moved away with her parents.

The house we spent so much time in became a hollow shell filled with phantoms and the family we created officially fell apart.

That’s the first time I felt I had a definite answer.

If there was such a thing as fate, I couldn’t imagine it’d be anything other than a cruel beast.

The night before school started, I snuck out of my house again and walked to the park where we met. I don’t know what I was planning on doing once I got there. Scream at it? Futilely try and tear it apart?

Instead I found myself gravitated onto the playground towards the tunnel where we first met. I crawled in and stared at the stars from the plastic cover.

I remembered her sitting there, eyeliner running down her face. Staring at the stars together, laughing at the shit world we live in. Texting her the second I got home and the stupid grin on my face when she responded. Throwing parties in her basement, sneaking onto her roof. Her hand nearly intertwined with mine. The way she looked at me when she said always and I said forever.

I began to sob as the pain of the past few months finally settled in. They were all gone, and it was real, not some horrible dream I could wake up from. They all left and nothing would ever be the same. The worst was knowing that I never got to tell her…

When I finally got a grip, I was hugging my knees to my chest, a complete mess. For a moment everything froze, and I had to laugh at
the irony. This was nearly exactly how I found her that first time. Part of me hoped that she would show up like I had. Another part knew it was mere fantasy. Still, I waited…

Waited…

Waited…

And no one came for me. The small hope remained mere fantasy.

Silently, I wiped away the tears, forced myself up, snuck back inside and slept, dreaming of absolutely nothing.

Fate is a cruel thing. It will propel you forward, maybe in the path of someone else. It will give you happiness, then tear it away without a moment’s hesitation.

And yet, if I could go back, I wouldn’t dare change a thing. I would sooner experience the same pain ten times over than forget about her smile, the way her eyes shined, the sound of her laugh, and all the times we spent under the stars.

She asked me about fate.

I may not be able to answer her anymore, but maybe I can give my answer to someone else, or even to our night sky. That if fate is real, it is devastatingly beautiful.
In a Shadow

Rachel Carter

In a shadow it is past
There is little present
It is never future

In a corner there is
Darkened warmth on
White scribbled walls

In a blanket there is
A solemn embrace
Thin and cold but heavy

In a bedroom there is
Solitude beyond dreams
And crowded cubbies

In a carpet there is
Dust from old and
Forgotten memories

In a memory there is
Empty noise and
Blurred blues and greens

In a teardrop there is
Release from torment
And longing whispers

In a smile there is
Remorseful remembrance
And terrified will

In a shadow it is future
Lingering on and on
Present is silent
Past is gone and gone
A Current (of) Thought in Quarantine

Rachel Carter

I don’t know how to write
How do you write?
I think I am a writer
but I don’t write
This poem has nothing
no metaphors or hidden meanings
It’s so plain and readily read
I suppose that was alliteration
but it was only two words
I thought inspiration would stay
but it left like…some kind of simile

My characters’ minds are mine
We are the same and we are different
I hate some of them but I love them all the same
This free verse annoys me
So does quarantine
There is no rhythm to drum
every thought that passes
Quarantine has rhythm
but it doesn’t change; it only festers
deep and dark and warm but it is also—
nothing
Teasing squares of light, framed by walls
No one is outside, though I can still see them
but I know they’re trying to hide
behind masks because they are terrified
I suppose that was a rhyme

We’re afraid of each other
Together we take the fall
We leave the house for little, white cylinders
and come back with more than enough food
We want to pass the time that never passes
like the thoughts with no rhythm
In the end, time becomes a blur and a memory
It’s all the same. Every day of the week
Every day is the same day
Every day is a different outfit, a different show
the same scenery

When this is over I’ll look at the sun
But will I change?
It’s dark but it’s not different
It’s similar but without contact
without cars and constant coffee and conversation
I actually liked that alliteration
This is my life except I actually went places
but I was quiet, silent as the world is now
But it is lively and loud on the inside
Just like the mouth in my mind
Will I remain the same, or will I take for better
what I took for granted for so long?
I don’t even know who I am
Who am I without my silence?
I am no one either way
People don’t recognize me when I speak
I wonder if they’d rather I kept silent
forever? Do they hate me?
I fear their rejection but I’ve never had it before
But do they reject me?

I need to know this before I take another chance
They tell me they don’t. But do they take me
for granted, for worse, for responsibility?
I am only the oldest and I was told never to worry,
I was trusted to come out of my shyness
one day but it never happened
The day never arrived, like an expected package
after Christmas (that was an adequate simile)
and now I am still quiet
quiet, quiet, quiet
These words are loud but I am quiet
quiet, quiet, quiet

I label myself nonetheless
I am an introvert
Quarantine is fun
By a Thread

Skylar Jaffe

It’s early in the morning and I’m back. I’m back at this factory where I work for little money and have only one short break. Like every morning, Momma and I walk to work surrounded by the cool fall weather and the busy businessmen rushing past us. My dad and I go to work so that Momma can stay home taking care of the babies. I’m just nine years old, and I should be in school. But alas, I’m stuck in this dusty factory to make my pay of forty cents.

We live in New York City where we are supposed to have opportunities thrown at us. My mamma tells me the Depression ruined the country. So our family struggles, and I must do what I can to help out.

My hair is pulled tightly back behind my face so it doesn’t get caught in any of the machinery. At the end of the day, I have headaches due to the tension of the tight hairdo. I look down at the same wrinkly dress I wear every day. Since I have to wear a dress and the weather is getting cooler, I wear a pair of thick stockings. While outside is cool, the factory gets so hot throughout the day. The fans don’t do much either. I have to move fast though and ignore the heat and any sweat that trickles down my face because I can’t risk losing my job. That can’t happen. As I walk through the entrance and go up the stairs to where I will spend the next eight hours, the old floorboards creak under the weight of each of my steps. This is an old building, and it doesn’t help that these shoes are a size too big causing me to walk weirdly. They were all my dad could afford, so I don’t complain.

I work as a doffer where I change out the spools of thread in the spinning machines. It’s dangerous, but it was the only available job that my dad could find me. It’s early in the day meaning there’s a lot of work that needs to be done. I see loads of empty spools that need to be changed. I pull a spool off and start the process of changing it. When I first started, I took so long to replace the thread, but now it’s all second nature to me. I don’t think much while I do it. I wish I had something that challenged my mind instead of being stuck in this stuffy factory. Now that it’s starting to get cooler, this job is having more of an effect on me. The elements cause my skin to dry. Because I’m using my hands all day, the skin on my hands often cracks while I’m changing the spools. By the end of the day, I have bloody painful knuckles. Momma tries to soothe them in warm water, and she applies a thick cream she bought at the corner store. It helps, but the next day the skin tears again in an ongoing never-ending cycle.

It’s been a few hours since I’ve arrived. I don’t know how much time I have left, but it’s time for my break. I grab my jacket and pull out the bread Momma gave me. We don’t have enough money for a proper lunch and I don’t have enough time to eat anything bigger than this piece of bread. Nevertheless, I munch on the bread letting the small amount of food fill my body. I look out of the window at the busy city. This is my favorite thing to do on my break. It helps me escape my reality. I see people walking around the city and living their lives. I long to be out there. I notice a
well-dressed little girl around my age. She holds a red book while riding in a carriage with her mom. Jealousy fills my body as she knows how to read. My momma doesn’t know how to either and my dad said he would teach me but he works ‘til late in the night. I’m always asleep when he gets home. I’ve never been to school before. By the time I was old enough to go to school, I was old enough to work which took priority for my family. Just as I finish my bread, it’s time to return to work.

The sun is starting to set which signals the workday is over. It gets dark so early here in the fall but at least it’s easier to gauge the time. The rest of my day is just as boring as the first half. I continue changing out the spools. We produce a lot of garments, so I have a lot to do, and I need to properly set up the people who work after I leave. I put on my coat, letting the warmth engulf my body. I worry for the winter as it usually brings sickness along with it. If I get sick and have to miss a day of work, I will be fired. The forty cents I make every day helps buy food for the family. We can’t afford to lose that.

After walking down the steep creaky staircase and out the door, the fresh air fills my lungs. This is the most satisfying part of my day. I sit on the stairs outside the factory building while I wait for my dad. He has a short break between his first job and his second job. He spends it walking me home. A few other children are waiting on the stairs with me. Some of them are playing card games and others are chatting with one another. Usually, I join in, but today I am too tired. My dad turns the corner which signals to me that I can finally leave. I’ll have a few hours to savor with Momma and the babies before I have to come back tomorrow.
Writers’ Profiles

Anne Ahern is a professional sailor, full-time pre-medical student, avid writer of poetry and the second eldest of 10 siblings. A devout believer in servant leadership, Anne hopes to bring both an empathetic and scientific perspective with her into a career as a physician.

John R. Beranek discovered his love for creating stories at a young age, while exploring the forests that surround his childhood home. Through writing, John has also discovered other passions including photography and history.

Stephanie Cave is studying early childhood education to pursue a career in teaching young children. She enjoys creative writing, music and fashion and if she weren’t going to be a teacher she’d love to be a famous writer.

Rachel Carter is a student, writer, singer, and small YouTuber on her writing channel: Miss Introvert. She loves to write poetry whenever inspiration strikes and spends as much time as she can with her family and her dogs, Max and Chester.

Za’Tozia Duffie is a future news anchor and philanthropist who enjoys travelling and meeting new people.

Skylar Jaffe plans to receive a bachelor’s in elementary education. In her free time, she likes to cook, bake, and run as well make coffee at her job as a barista.

Stephen Kelly enjoys tabletop games, history, and playing drums. He shares with his siblings the propensity to dig deep when analyzing stories, specifically movies.

Kat Mamulashvili is a communication major at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She hopes to work either in diplomacy, academia, or journalism.

Aubrey Moehlenpah strives to become an author and live out her dreams of being a best-selling novelist. In her free time, she runs a poetry account on Instagram @aubreyvanmoeh and likes to explore new places.

Karen Moreno is a future engineer who looks forward to building new skills and gaining experience when she transfers in the fall. Her free time consists of finding new ways to express her creativity through art.
Chris Pittman plans to transfer to the University of Illinois Springfield in the fall where he will pursue his goal of becoming a secondary education English teacher. His hobbies include writing poetry, playing video games, and being there for the ones he cares about.

Cassandra Lynn Ronning aspires to be a full-time writer and has recently finished her first book. Until then she plans on earning a master’s in English to teach college-level classes. When she isn’t writing she is definitely thinking about writing, coffee, her cat, or napping.

Simon Sazian is a second-year student in the engineering program at CLC, and plans to pursue a bachelor’s in civil engineering. He is very involved in the local Armenian community of Chicago, and enjoys weightlifting, collecting sneakers, listening to music in foreign languages, travelling, and experiencing new foods.

Ciara White is passionate about creative writing and would love to be an author in the future. “Station Road” is the foundation for her first full-length novel.