

# **BOOM**

**a student publication**

**COURAGE**



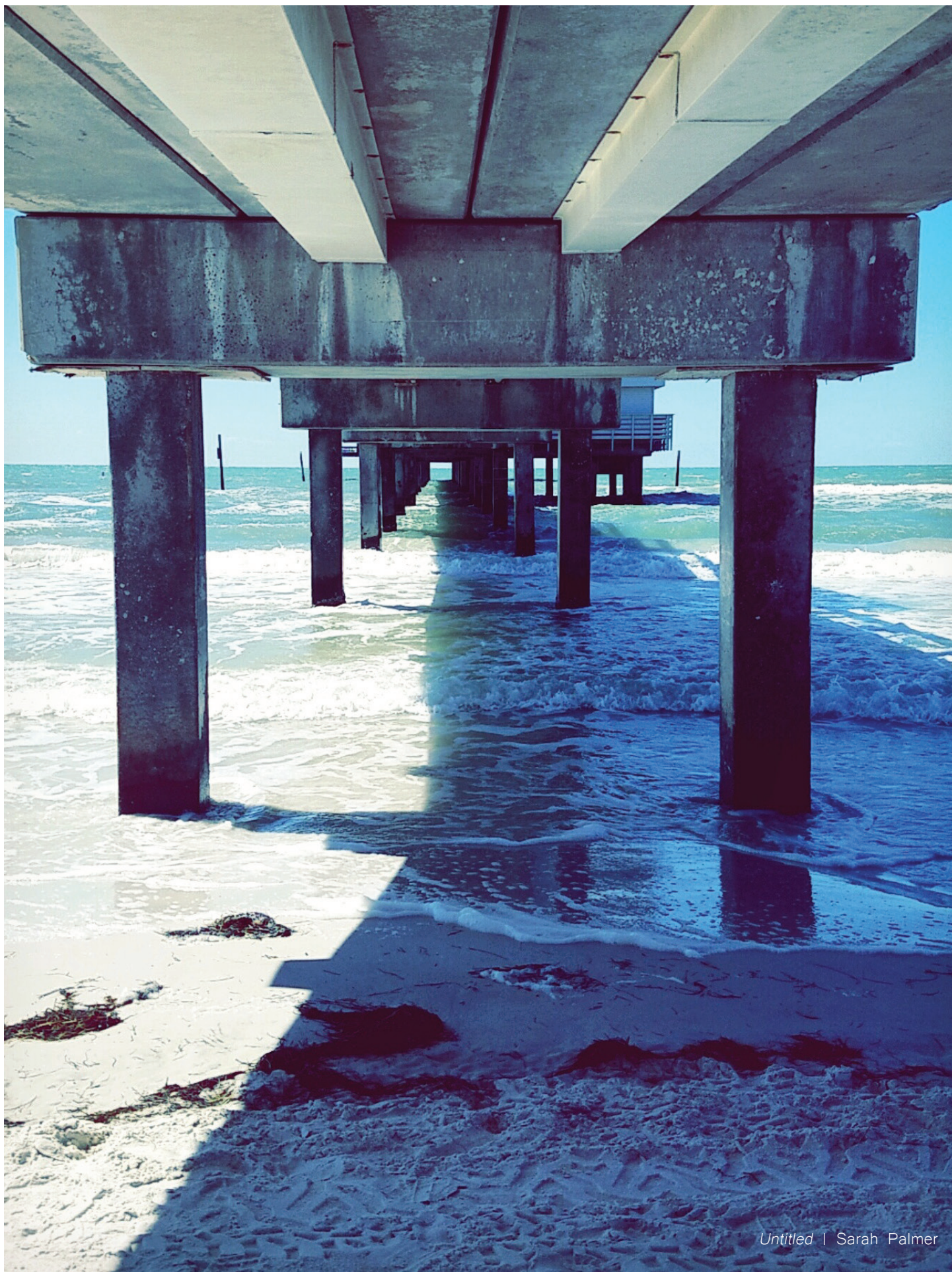
Cover

*The Word of Light* | Belou Quimby

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Untitled | Sarah Palmer



# Splash

John Bendewald

slow float like driftwood  
 from a dead sea— salt-worn  
 sun-bleached and riptide tumble-dried—  
 wash in as if pushed by a moon-pulled wave  
 from the vestibule to the triage to  
 a shore unexplored by the wayward  
 wayfaring drop of grey ocean

forgo the anesthesia, Doc  
 I never was one for being numbed  
 (unless by my own damn hand!)

permission to puncture, Sir  
 spile me, penetrate enough rings  
 and you might just find an oil well  
 I don't know if cold lumber bleeds  
 but I'm willing to try; I'll sap amber  
 or crimson if it means I'll finally get to see  
 some color



# Kind-of A Cinderella Story

By Benjamin Kit Wong

I'M from California, and before you ask, let me confirm. My life is exactly like a movie. Every Hollywood Cliche applies. Family wedding's are farcical comedies, trips to the coast are a hazy indie film, and of course, my prom night ended exactly like Carrie; with me, covered in pigs blood screaming while everyone died. So of course, whenever I leave college to go home for the summer, it's a fun summer comedy. I had this internship one summer

and I had to cross the bridge to the peninsula everyday, wind blowing my hair, sunglasses on, belting with my radio the whole way there. The radios in California are always playing California Girls. Alternating between the Katy Perry and the Beach Boys versions. Sometimes we get Dani California by the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

At the theatre company where I had my internship, my boss was Harold, a Filipino American playwright and director. He took great pride in me, a Chinese American playwright and director, and I was this strange marvel from a strange school in a strange foreign country—in I Oh Wah. I was the only Asian intern, and one of the

first interns to start, the rest of them coming from prestigious California schools and Ivy Leagues on a regular semester plan. Due to the small size of the company, I was to share a cubicle with one of these interns.

My cubicle mate's name was Darren and he went to Stanford. That was all I knew about him at first. But then he showed up one Monday morning. I was eating a bagel and got cream cheese on my face. He was a 6' 1" blond blue-eyed boy with a sense of style and an interest in musical theatre. He respected my need to keep our cubicle in a certain way, allowed me to change the name of it daily, and he loved The Last Five Years. He could play the piano.



(There was about a week I let him teach me how to play the piano before I told him I had learned to play in third grade.)

We'd go to lunch together and sit and talk and joke about things. I'd talk about comedy ideas I had, plays I wanted to write. About my mom's cancer, about being the only Chinese person in my department, about being 2000 miles from home. He'd talk about wanting to write musicals, about going to Stanford, about being a college student in the Bay. We'd drive to the artist apartments and pick-up rental cars, and we'd sing musicals, especially *The Last Five Years*, and I'd take Snapchat videos of him. I fell asleep once while we were stuck in rush hour traffic in the warm sunlight to him singing "*Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered am I.*" For better or for worse, we were work married.

Everything changed, from my perspective, when another intern came in, a curly haired fiend with a laugh like a bludgeoning weapon who plopped a cake between Darren and I during a lunch in the green room. His name was Jamie, he was a triple threat; acting, singing, and dancing, with a baking extension. He'd bring in cookies and cakes and fudge and like a homewrecker would march his ass into our blissful cubicle everyday at 2pm when Darren would turn to me, put his head on my shoulder and proclaim, "I need chocolate!"

I started keeping a mason jar of Ghirardelli chocolates on my desk to give to him. And to throw at Jamie like a hero throws salt at demons. The other interns would start taking longer lunch breaks, gathering in the rehearsal rooms to sing, Darren at the center. I had work to do. Flight plans to make,

artist accommodations and contracts to put together. Harold started giving me more and more work and responsibilities. I ran auditions for the upcoming season. More members of the company started getting annoyed with their missing interns. I started doing Darren and the other interns' work too. By myself, I'd organize binders, print and load scripts, and prep welcome bags while singing *The Last Five Years* as high as I could. Darren still didn't notice me.

I didn't have time to bake. I didn't have the free time these other interns did. They were getting money from their colleges. I had a second job so that I had money. During the weekdays I'd be at TheatreWorks and nights I'd work at The Prolific Oven, a French bakery-cafe in Fremont. Weekends, I'd come in at 7, bake the warm pastries, open the restaurant at 8, and by 9 all of my warm pastries would be gone. People went nuts for my filled croissants, danishes and bear-claws. Cookies and almond twists. I smiled at babies, flirted with greying old ladies, rolled my eyes at the obnoxious coffee orders of teenagers. I had a small following of high schoolers who would fawn over my reaction to their orders. Apparently #MyBitchyBarista was trending. I had two jobs, worked 7 days a week. I didn't have time to bake for fun. I baked for money. I'd come home exhausted; clean the house for my mom, in cancer recovery, and then would pass out. I didn't have time to bake.

At the end of August was the New Works Festival. The company had brought in over 70 artists to work on 3 musicals and 2 plays running side-by-side. Everything I had been working towards and the

event that would swallow my entire life for the next few weeks was happening. And we were having a potluck brunch. Jamie was pulling out the stops, 2 cakes and scones in all kinds of flavors.

Like the fairy godmother appearing to Cinderella before the ball, my mother came into the dining room one morning and slammed a jar of our homemade plum spice jam in front of me. This plum spice was one of our signatures. Plums from the tree in our yard, notes of orange, cinnamon and nutmeg. It smelled like Christmas morning and love and warmth and family. "Biscuits," my mother said. "A good biscuit makes everyone feel like they're at home." I showed up like the picture of a 60s housewife, in gingham plaid and denim and a basket of biscuits wrapped in a fabric napkin. Everyone had compliments to give, the soft butter biscuits a delight, the jam nostalgic and familiar, yet new. I had showed Jamie up.

But that evening at the festival toast, while all the other interns danced and fraternized with the artists, I was stuck behind the bar serving champagne. They never once looked at me. Darren never looked at me, had never noticed me. None of them would. Except for Jamie, who would throw what felt like a smug look over his shoulder at me. I wasn't Cinderella. I was Benjamin Wong. And Benjamin Wong doesn't get the prince at the end of the story, he just gets all the work. At the end of the night, when I went to my car, I began to cry. I was exhausted. Then, there was a knocking at my car window.

According to the movies, Darren would be there to pull me out of my beat up 2000 Honda Ac-

cord, pull me into his arms and kiss me. Jamie would stomp his feet and promptly get hit by a bus. There'd be a happy pop music ballad in the background, maybe a wedding and the credits would roll. Maybe even a musical number. I'd never have problems again.

But it wasn't Darren. It was Harold. I got out of the car to talk to him, and he put his hand on my shoulder. "You're the best intern that I've ever had, Benjamin," he said. "I'd go so far to say that you're family now, like a little brother. I'll be waiting for you to ask me for a letter of recommendation." He was amazed by how motivated and talented I was. That I could work at a restaurant, at a theatre company, and still have time to have a life and put myself together and be a real, interesting person.

This story doesn't end in a musical number. Yet. I'm working on it. But it does end in a different cliché. I worked my ass off. I pushed myself to the edges of what I could do and still didn't get the man. But I got something better. In losing my "prince," someone reminded me of how amazing I was by myself, without the help of some beautiful boy who can play the piano. I'm a beautiful boy who can schedule flight arrangements and accommodations for 70 artists and pour champagne. Try doing that with a piano.

4 months later, Jamie and I were seated at a bar down the street from the theatre after catching a preview of "Crimes of the Heart." The next day, I would get on a plane bound for Cornell. Gesturing flamboyantly with his Moscow mule, he said "You're grit personified Benjamin. Who gives a fuck what Darren thinks? He's a flake.

You're dependable, you're honest, and goddammit you work harder than anyone else I've ever met."

I finished my drink and looked him in the eyes. "Fuck you. I don't need a man to tell me who I am. I'm Benjamin motherfucking Wong."





What holds a country together?  
1st law of social stability

Cultural literacy  
by sharing common knowledge form  
commonality  
Hirsch

we give kids cultural capital

Canon

Day 13

Testimony  
Collective F  
characterized  
- Dyer





Kahn Thomas Branch



# The New Dichotomy

Jessica Halter

Wake up every morning,  
(Days go by, and that's not new)  
Tell yourself you'll be okay,  
Do what you have to do.

Wait to realize, once again  
The new dichotomy:  
You have to go on living, though  
You don't like what you see.

Wake up every morning,  
(Sometimes, the sky is blue)  
Tell yourself the world's alright,  
Do what you have to do.

Far abroad and close to home  
The new dichotomy:  
You have to go on living, though  
You don't like what you see.

Wake up every morning,  
(Cuz what else can you do?)  
Tell yourself the world's okay,  
Do what you have to do.

Here awake and here in dreams  
The new dichotomy:  
You have to go on living, though  
You don't like what you see.



# Those You Neglect

By Randy Santiago

**C**ocotasos were the symbol of our relationship. For those of you who aren't Hispanic Caribbean, un cocotaso is

a rap to the head with the knuckles. That shit don't feel nice, in case y'all were wondering. Bucky hit me with them often, raising his hand above my head like a hammer before rocking me. They came my way for various reasons: I didn't eat fast enough; I spoke too low; I gave him a look; I was walking too close to him. Basically, my crime was existing within his boundaries.

I won't pretend as if I was the only one Bucky targeted—him and Ma used to box, literally—but it felt personal sometimes. Unlike Ma, I couldn't defend myself. Whenever Bucky laid his hands on her, Ma got

to swinging and she usually came out on top. I remember one time, when I was like five or six, hearing a dish shatter in the kitchen and waking to Bucky dashing through the sala. Nico and I quickly sat up upon hearing the crash and saw Ma chasing Bucky with a clothes iron. She hit him on the head with it and forced him out of the apartment. It got rough sometimes. I couldn't triumph like Ma did, so I had to settle for minor victories, like gradually emptying his bottle of Southern Comfort when no one was around: it was his preferred drink. Don't act surprised that he was an alcoholic.

Bucky often took Malik on his liquor runs, strapping him into the busted Mercury Cougar that he drove. Malik was by far his favorite; I genuinely believe that Bucky preferred him to Ma. You see, Ma started dating Bucky just a few months after Malik was born, which

made Malik his unofficial son.

Bucky protected him like a son too, attacking me or Nico whenever we got into it with him. Shit, he even started fights with Ma for being too rough with Malik. There were times when he slapped Malik around, as abusers tend to do, but he always covered it up with kind gestures. Malik got gifts and money and he even got to work odd jobs with Bucky throughout the city. He always came back home and bragged about all the money he made working and about the places they went to. It was aggravating. Why the hell would I care about where he went or what they did? Worse yet, Malik began telling people that Bucky was his dad. Bucky, his father.

That's not our dad, papi is, I said one day.

But we never see papi, Malik responded.

We saw our dad maybe twice a year on average, if we were lucky; usually just once though. The common occasions were Malik's birthday, which was in the summer, and Christmas, where three December birthdays were meshed together for one half-assed celebration. I always felt bad when he showed, because I didn't know him and usually distanced myself, quietly chilling in the corner while my siblings embraced him. He rarely approached me to ask how I was or what was on my mind. Ma never pressured me into interactions with him, but she encouraged them. She knew more than anyone that he was trash, but she didn't want to taint me or my siblings with that mindset. My dad and Bucky were similar in that they both pretended to be my father but didn't possess enough desire to fulfill the role. I was too quiet for both, too different.



Bucky's philosophy was this: one cocotaso a day makes the softness go away. Although he never uttered the words, I felt them with each blow. It got to a point where I became terrified of Bucky—I avoided him at all costs. If I woke before him, I'd wait for him to get up and use the bathroom first, so that there wouldn't be any conflict; I never got breakfast before he left for work, unless Ma gave me the okay. For a while it seemed like the cycle would never end, but then one day it did.

It was so sudden how it happened. Ma and Bucky were arguing outside the building about some "nasty bitch" Bucky was seeing on the side. Apple relayed that information to us as she peered out the window, her fingers stretching the blinds like Bucky did the truth out on the street. The blinds eventually fell from the pressure of Apple's weight, which led Bucky to charge back into the apartment. I was standing near the window with Apple when he came, attempting to fix the blinds. That meant a nice cocotaso to the head, but that wasn't the worst part. Bucky slapped Apple directly across the face, causing her to fall to the ground, a large red mark staining her cheek.

Apple rushed Ma when she entered the apartment. You can guess what happened next: they started boxing again and this time it got ugly. After moving on Bucky, Ma called my dad and told him what happened; my dad then proceeded to call my tio Gordo and a couple acquaintances. Bucky attempted to dip before they came, running down the steps with his dog, Bullet, but my pops and tio caught him before he could peel out. They pinned him down and forced him over to the alley. We were all outside at this point, so I

made way to the alley, attempting to cop a peek at what was going down. Gordo had a gun pointed at Bucky and threatened to shoot him and the dog. It was my first time seeing a gun; had Bucky been shot and killed, it would've been the second dead body I encountered—the first was laid out down the block, near the corner. Bucky's body wouldn't hit the pavement though, he'd just disappear for a couple years.

The first year or so after Bucky's disappearance was rough. Ma couldn't afford an apartment on her own, so she'd rent out rooms from friends and we'd spend weeks or months there. Money for food was also lacking, so we all had to consume less to accommodate for the void. Once she started seeing Mandell, things got better. Sure, we were living in the projects, but it was a stable home. Mandell worked as a janitor in a west side middle school but lived out south, so we had to commute with him into the city every day for that summer. The rides were long and boring, but Mandell was cool, so I had no problem being in a space with him that long and so often.

While in the city, we'd often chill with our abuela, while Ma looked for work. It was through abuela that Bucky reemerged in our lives. If you haven't already pondered it, yes, Bucky did find it difficult to be away from Malik. Initially, Ma didn't wanna hear shit about Bucky, so she pretended as though she wasn't aware that him and Malik were spending time together. She also turned the other cheek when he gave Malik money, some for himself and some for Ma to buy food, cosmetics, toilet paper, whatever we needed in the house. It pissed me off every time

Malik handed her that mon-

ey. The thought of Bucky lending a hand disgusted me; I still hadn't been able to overlook the damage that those hands had done just a few years prior.

Things got to a point where Ma, and even Mandell, became comfortable with Bucky stopping by the house to get Malik for a weekend. We moved into an apartment on the west side, which gifted Bucky greater visitation rights. I couldn't stand his ass, but I have to give him props for his dedication. My sentiments were different at the time though. Those days Bucky pulled through to get Malik were some of the worst for me. Sometimes he would come into our apartment to help Malik pack or to carry some stuff down to the car. The motherfucker had the nerve to greet me on several occasions. I usually sat to the side and ignored him, as was my tendency, but I never failed to issue him my signature "Motherfucker we ain't cool, so don't talk to me" glare. I liked to think that my disinterest and neglect damaged him as much as his presence did me, but it never seemed to work that way. He was confident that our relationship would better over time; I've never been so optimistic.

We attended the Puerto Rican festival in Humboldt Park every year—that, along with the cocotasos I'd endured and the food Ma made daily, were the extent of my Puerto Rican identity. I honestly didn't know that Puerto Rico wasn't a country for the first 16 years of my life, which explained why there were thick accents in my family, but no immigrants.

I was eight the summer Mandell decided to join us for the festival. He enjoyed everything about it: the food, the dancing, the music. He grew up in Alabama and

hadn't experienced anything like it before. It made me happy, knowing that Ma was with someone who held an interest in her, in us. Mandell was a fanatic of basketball, so you can imagine his face when he saw the Puerto Rican flag jersey's that vendors were selling throughout the festival grounds. Along with a jersey for himself, he bought me a hat that had the flag and a coquí, the national animal, stitched to its front. I wore that hat everywhere I went for months after the festival.

Sometime during that summer, Bucky was to take Malik for a week. I'd be lying if I said

I wasn't jealous of Malik for having someone in his life who genuinely cared about him. I know Ma and Mandell cared but it always seemed like they had to, and that sometimes they didn't wish to, but Bucky always stretched himself apart for Malik.

The day came that he would pick Malik up and, as custom went, he entered the apartment. Upon entering, he greeted me again, and complimented my hat. We're hermanos Boricuas, he said, a confident grin on his face.

We'll never be brothers, I said. I stomped the hat in the backyard later that day, in a patch of dirt and then tossed it. Ma said we could've washed it, but I was beyond that.

Ma and Mandell would split for the same reason she and Bucky did, which made me despise Mandell more than I wanted to. Quite simply, he hurt Ma and I could never forgive him for that.

Just like before, finances became tight and Ma was struggling. But guess who came to our aid? Bucky of course; it was always Bucky. He brought some food, cooked for us, left some money and

promised to find us an apartment.

The apartment was decent, three bedrooms with a full living room. It was the nicest place we'd lived in to be honest, but when Bucky asked me what I thought of it, I said: it's alright, I'd prefer windows without bars though. Allowing him to know that I was appreciative of his actions, in any form, was not an option. I couldn't help thinking about the fact that it was him, and not Mandell, who looked out for us though.

It was after we moved into that apartment, and after Ma started seeing Dave, and after he proclaimed himself dictator, and after my depression reached its furthest depths that Bucky pulled a strap on Dave. Now, before I continue with the story, I'll say this: the story of Dave would take a week to tell, maybe longer, but you should know this much 1) he was an unrelenting force who imposed his will on us, physically and psychologically for four years 2) my mother bore brunt of that 3) Apple was harmed in some way or another, all of which leads us to Bucky.

I honestly don't know how or when Bucky learned of what had been happening, but it didn't matter. What did matter was that he drove two hours from his home that night, with several acquaintances in the car, and parked down the block from us, with a .32 in hand. I'm talking .32 as in Magnum, revolver. He was set on shooting Dave on sight, but Ma talked him out of it. At the time, I wished he had done it; I wanted to see Dave laid out on the ground, rid from my life forever. I was fifteen then and eager for revenge, but Bucky was right in fighting the urge. I think it was then that my feelings toward Bucky began conflicting; then that I'd begun

to realize that he wasn't the same person who cracked me on the head every chance he got; then that it dawned on me that he wasn't just protecting Malik and Ma throughout the years, but all of us. I'd drop my guard too late though.

Bucky was drunk the night he came to settle his beef with Dave; he was also drunk just about every night after. I'd later find out from Malik that Bucky began downing a bottle of Southern Comfort a night not long after he and Ma split. That led to cirrhosis of the liver, which ate away at his body like a cancer. His skin became scaly and his eyes were yellow—I'm talking yellow as a lemon. It scared the shit out of me.

One day, Bucky came to our new apartment, by Fullerton and Kostner, to bring some food for the week and asked for help with the bags. I was the only one home, so I had no choice but to assist him. I honestly didn't recognize him when I made it down. He was thin and frail and his arms were trembling rapidly. All he could carry was a couple loaves of bread; the doctors told him that he shouldn't lift more than five pounds and to keep it under ten. I carried everything upstairs and offered him a seat but refused to eat with him. I told him that I had a lot of homework to do, that sophomore year was rough. But that was all bullshit.

When it came time to leave, he asked for help walking down the steps (our stairs were a fucking death trap) so I held on to him closely the whole way down. It was the closest I'd ever been to him and it made me uncomfortable, so I rushed down the last couple steps. When we reached the car, I saw several tiny bottles of Southern Comfort lying throughout the interior.

You've gotta slow down with that shit, man, I said, it's gonna kill you.

He chuckled and responded, that's the least of my problems.

As Malik grew older, his relationship with Bucky became less intimate. Malik was a teenager and wanted to chill with his boys, while Bucky wanted to spend time with him. So, they agreed to spend a day together in Berwyn, where Bucky lived with some relatives.

Malik called Bucky several times on the day that they were supposed to chill but never got a response. It wasn't like Bucky not to pick up the phone immediately. Not long after, Ma received a call from a relative of Bucky, stating that he'd slipped when getting off his bed that morning and ruptured his liver upon contact with the ground. He spent the next twenty minutes coughing up blood before the ambulance arrived.

Ma, Malik and Apple were distraught, Nico was accommodating, and I, well, I just sat aside, uncertain of what to feel. I tried my best to console Malik whenever we were alone, encouraging him to express what he was feeling verbally and not physically—he'd begun rolling with some suspect dudes, which also worried Bucky. Most of my efforts were fruitless, but once Bucky's time drew nearer, Malik broke. He's HIV positive, he told me, his tears colliding against my chest.

That doesn't make sense though, I said, he wasn't a user.

Nah, man, you know how he was locked up for 21 years?

I didn't want to answer because I knew where the conversation was going and I knew what that would mean for my feelings toward Bucky and I knew that I would feel

pity for him and to feel pity for a man like him was to demean myself. Yeah, I said.

He was raped, a couple times. He paused and then said, I just found out earlier... that's what's killing him.

About a day or two later, Bucky would lose his ability to respond. I decided to tag along with the others to see him in the hospital: I was the only one who hadn't gone by that point. He was lying motionless in a bed when we entered, tubes were hooked up to his mouth and nose: he was on life support. I stood outside the room while everyone else interacted with him, avoiding my emotions as long as I could. As Ma was preparing to leave, she asked if I wanted to talk with Bucky.

He can't respond, I said.

That doesn't mean he can't hear you.

I hadn't fully entered the room before breaking down. That was the first time I would sob that way, the first time I lost complete control of my body. I never got to say anything to Bucky, something I'm content with to this day. I trust that he heard me, that my sobs reverberated throughout his mind up until the point they pulled the plug.

He died sometime in April 2011; I don't remember which day. Ma and Malik went to the funeral, maybe Apple too; Nico was chilling with his girlfriend; I hung back at the crib, alone.

From time to time, I'd punch myself in the face, handling my emotions the only way I knew how. It never succeeded in crushing my sadness or ridding Bucky from my mind, but it provided me a strange comfort. I never choose to think of Bucky when memories of him resurface, he chooses to enter

my mind. Isn't that always how it goes? Those you neglect become those you yearn for most, your hermanos Boricuas.

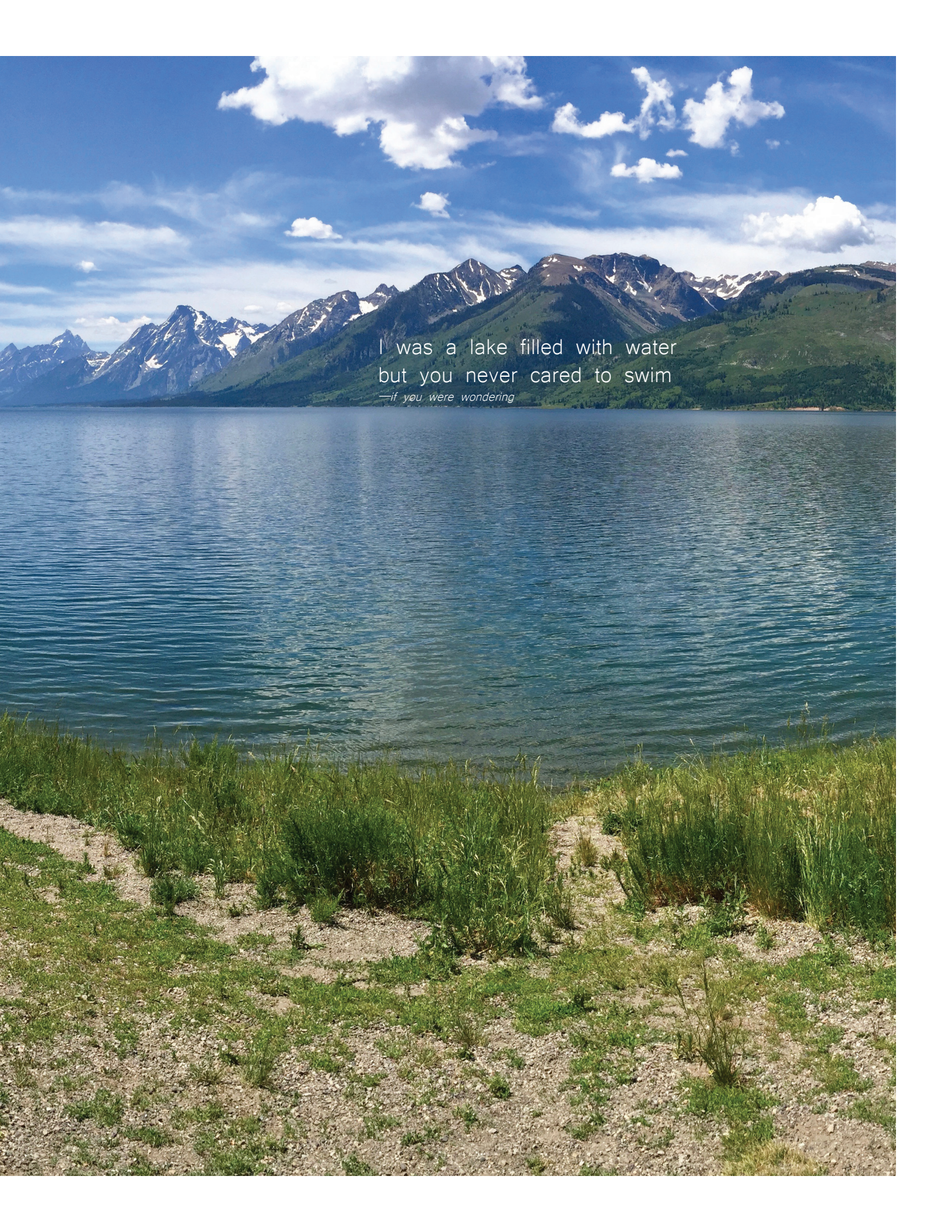




*Poem and Photograph* | George Jameson Courville







I was a lake filled with water  
but you never cared to swim  
*—if you were wondering*



# Two Sonnets for Michael Brown

Glenn Freeman

## I.

*My Facebook Feed the Day before Thanksgiving: an Erasure*

It's the best profession in the world, a weapon  
for justice.

A system cannot fail that wasn't meant  
to protect.

How many miles will you walk?  
Just an old lefty saying what he thought,  
that race is there, a troubled constant.

We must question authority, confront  
those who abuse power, side with the victims,  
the vulnerable.

We must own the system.  
We have lost our key; we are trying  
to find it.

We all used to read *The Saturday Evening  
Post*.

Last year, a cheerless meal in Kandahar.  
It is one of our four freedoms.

I have discovered  
fleece leggings.

Thank you Norman Rockwell.  
Feel good about other people; share this article.

## II.

*My Facebook Feed the Day After Thanksgiving: an Erasure*

Up to 50% off.

Find out the shocking

answer. Free shipping today.

I've got six

fucking kids to feed.

Missed connections.

*I have not lived*

*what you have lived.*

I'm really liking

how this game's going.

*I have not lived*

*what you have lived.*

It's time for the Waltons to pay

a living wage.

Some behaviors stay

in the family.

*I have not lived*

*what you have lived.*

No one knew how far

we'd march.

I'd like to tell the cop I'm not

afraid, but I am.

Finally upgrading.

I will not

stop shopping.

Denver, Seattle, Baltimore.

We were told to go home in pairs

for protection.

Please feel free to share.





# LIVELIT

## *That Time I Tried To Read A Personal Essay Out Loud in Front of Other People*

By Maureen Sullivan

As a white, middle-class female, my only oppressors are the patriarchy and the sun. Thanks to my parents, though, I didn't fully realize the threat of either of these things for the first third of my life, because to strengthen me against the latter they slathered me in SPF 70 sunblock, and to strengthen me against the former they gave me books.

As a little kid, I loved stories. Like many other young girls, I loved princess stories in particular. One of my absolute favorites was *The Paperbag Princess*. I'm not going to read you the book, but as you can guess from the title, there's a princess. She's going to marry a prince. Then one day a dragon attacks the castle, kidnaps the prince, and burns everything, including all her clothes. So she puts on the only thing she can find to wear, which is a paper bag, hence the title, and sets off to find the dragon. Through a series of crafty comments, she tricks the dragon and manages to free the prince she was all set to marry. Upon being rescued from a fire breathing beast by a resourceful and intelligent princess, he prompt-

ly insults her paper bag dress. She decides she doesn't want to marry him, after all, and she skips off into the sunset.

I loved other unconventional princesses too, including Petronella, a girl born to a king in a land where the royal family traditionally has three sons, and Cimorene, who runs away from the castle and volunteers to be a dragon's princess because she wants to learn magic and use Latin to organize the dragon's library.

But it wasn't limited to just princesses - what I really gravitated towards was anything involving headstrong girls who saved the day by taking initiative and using creative problem solving skills. A lot of these heroines also happened to have fiery red hair - I'm not sure if that was something my parents did to try to give me someone to relate to or if I, as a lonely ginger child, just sought them out.

When I become older and graduated to chapter books, I was captivated by the total independence and physical strength of the classic character Pippi Longstocking. When I moved into longer novel series, I was obsessed with stories like Tamora Pierce's *Alanna*, where the title character decides

she wants to study fighting instead of magic. Girls aren't allowed to be warriors, so she disguises herself as a boy. She trades places with her twin brother and keeps up the charade through years of study and swordplay until she achieves her goal of becoming a knight. She was stubborn and strong and spoke her mind and I wanted to be just like her.

Looking back on it, these books I read as I was growing up set a solid foundation for feminism, although I didn't know the word at the time. After these stories, it seemed like common sense - it never occurred to me not to consider women as equally capable, brave, and intelligent as men. I went most of my life assuming that feminism was the default - but the world eventually taught me otherwise.

I am fortunate not to have any extreme examples of how this happened. There was no sudden shock, no traumatic incident in which I was harassed or attacked. Rather, it was in many small ways that I realized the sexist structure our society imposes on women. It's the men assuming you'll be the one to move on the sidewalk, the nonsensical pant sizes, the targeted advertising - a continuum of messag-

es that made me realize that women were seen as somehow different, somehow lesser.

I was told recently that I have “too many female friends” - which, like, what does that even mean? I suppose it stems from that chick flick cliché that girls cause all kind of drama, gossiping behind your back and ready to sabotage you at the first chance, but I never understood those movies because my experiences have been nothing like that. My female friends have never been anything but supportive and kind, so I don’t get how you could possibly have too many of them. Other girls are great - they’ll give you spare hair tie or walk you home at night or tuck in your tag when it’s flipped outside your shirt. I don’t know why there are so many references in pop culture to how terrible girls are to each other, and I don’t want to know how many women actually consider other women the enemy because of this conditioning.

I wonder how much of who I am has been shaped by this cultural context around me - things I think I chose for myself or qualities I take for part of my personality that are in actuality a product of my environment. Do I often refrain from speaking up in groups because I’m a quiet and introverted person, or is it because as a female, I’ve lived my entire life in a society where men talk more and talk over women? Do I actually dislike math and science, or have I just internalized the harmful misconception that women are inherently less skilled in STEM fields? What if the only reason I don’t like pink is because I’m subconsciously trying to reject the rhetoric equating femininity with weakness, and by avoiding this color proclaim that I’m not “like

those other girls”? How much of what I think of as me is actually shaped entirely by the gender roles that pervade our entire culture? Sometimes I feel bad for enforcing these stereotypes - like I shouldn’t be quiet, or like baking, or enjoy painting my nails - but if I *don’t* do those things just to be contrary then aren’t I letting myself be controlled just as much?

I know that I have many privileges and I am incredibly fortunate in other ways. For one, I am apparently one of the very few women in the world who’s never been catcalled. Obviously, being able to go about my business without being subject to demeaning remarks or attempts at intimidation is a positive thing, but here’s what’s messed up about living in a society where this kind of sexualized harassment is so commonplace - I wonder sometimes if there’s something wrong with me because it’s never happened to me? Which is actually really disturbing, that some small part of me feels like I should base my self worth on my ability to be sexually objectified by strangers. Like, no one’s ever shouted disgusting, degrading things at me - and sometimes I catch myself wondering if it’s because I’m not pretty enough?

I’d like to tell myself it’s just because I’m just too intimidating to even approach - I have what I’ve been told is a severe case of resting bitch face. Even from a young age people often asked me if something was wrong because I looked angry or upset, and I had to tell them, no, that’s just my face, that’s just how it looks all the time... Later on I learned the phrase that explained why people apparently thought I was stuck up or scary before I even knew them, the phrase that I started

using to reassure people that I was actually not a completely hateful human being - it’s not you, just resting bitch face, I promise. Here’s what I want to know though: why isn’t there a male equivalent? Do men just not have negative qualities projected onto their neutral existence? Why do women seem to owe the world something just going about their daily lives?

But here’s the thing: women don’t owe the world anything. Nothing about ourselves should be up for the unsolicited advice of others. Unfortunately, this sense of entitlement to a woman’s appearance is extremely common, whether it be a man telling a stranger to smile or a prince insulting the paper bag dress of the girl who just saved him from a dragon. This is why stories are so important to me though - they refuted every misconception on what women couldn’t or shouldn’t do. Girls didn’t need a man, but if they wanted one they didn’t need to wait for him to make the first move - Petronella actively chooses to marry the sorcerer instead of the lazy prince she was originally trying to rescue. Girls could be physically strong - Library Lil is very muscular from carrying around encyclopedias, and when a tough biker gang refuses to move their motorcycles she moves them herself by picking them up and throwing them one-handed across the parking lot. Just as I was inspired by the heroines I worshipped growing up, we can all (figuratively, not literally) take a page from these books in recognizing the unlimited potential of women.



# Black-Eyed Susan

Addie Pacha

Poor Susan

Always coverin' her bruisin'.

To protect that mean old rat of a man

And also her pride, no one would understand.

She could cover them up with long sleeves and whiskey,

'Cause he knew a hit to the face was too risky.

But one day when he slapped her, Susan started to cry

And her nasty husband punched her right in the eye.

Susan ran outside, her tears dropped to the ground.

And black-eyed yellow flowers grew up all around.



# Permeation

Carly Pierson

Rain melting into the concrete  
 Pooling at the cracks, the broken parts.  
 Rain, seep into my skin  
 Pooling at my heart, my lungs, my bones, my broken parts.  
 Create a downpour within me, flush out  
 The dark shadows under my ribs and at the back of my skull,  
 Drown the greed and poison hiding behind my sternum and in  
 The sockets of my hips.  
 The fear of being let go, it itself clinging so tightly to the bones in my feet—  
 Pry it off, though gaspingly painful as it may be, then let it be  
 Washed away, tumbled against my shins and ankles, worn smooth.  
 Cracked open like an oyster and realizing at its core lies  
 Not fear, but a fierce love.  
 Let me recognize this love in every step and be  
 Cognizant of the incessant life that pulls at each bone,  
 Each joint and ligament, each part of me that may shelter  
 A demon—but realize that the demon wears spines,  
 And she herself has forgotten the softness it protects—  
 For what births fear but the most desperate of love?  
 Now let the sea rest, the saltiness of the sunk and dissolved pain,  
 Past sins now vulnerable and cradled, a sapidity at the back of my throat,  
 And self-forgiveness, let it settle and seep into my marrow, permeate my blood cells.  
 I breathe in, I breathe out. Let my respiration condensate, let the process begin  
 Again.





*Get out of my living room | Garrett Ginell*  
Snapped off the Coast of San Salvador, Bahamas





# The Gilded Clock

By Bryan E. Katz-James

The clock ticked consistently, loudly, and ominously as the president of the Corporate Alliance of Banking looked down at Tony from his tall leather chair. “You have five minutes to convince me that I shouldn’t fire you on the spot,” the man said, setting an egg timer and placing it on his cedar desk.

“Okay,” Tony took a deep breath, “One, it wasn’t my fault, two, the squirrels bribed me, three, Mr. Michaelson didn’t stop me, and four, I really, really need this job.” The dual ticking of the timer and the shiny clock was starting to mess with his head. They were just out of sync, which stayed in the back of his mind like a puncturevine bur.

The president scoffed. “Vice President Michaelson has informed me of your conversation. He has made it clear that you were especially opaque about what you were planning for the office party, and were asking for his approval in the same manner as a whining dog. Of course he didn’t stop you. You never mentioned the potato cannons or the acorn guns.”

“Look, I just got caught up in the excitement! I’ve never gotten to plan such a big event before,” Tony pointed out. He sighed. “I know it got kind of out of hand-”

“Kind of out of hand?! You covered everyone in upper management with potatoes and acorns! You released hundreds of squirrels into the room! Furthermore, when I asked you to help clean up the place, you had a laughing fit for twenty minutes, then told me to stick an acorn up my butt!” The president stood, launching his chair against the wall. The clock swayed above it,

but did not fall. The egg timer began clucking.

Tony slouched in his seat. “Sorry?”

The president stood stock still. “Sorry doesn’t even to begin to cover the amount of mayhem you unleashed.” His blackberry buzzed, and he glared at it. His gaze softened. “Excuse me,” he said, then left the room. Tony looked at the clock. Yup, still ticking. It was almost noon, which, on a normal day, meant he was about to get his lunch break. Today he doubted he would eat at all due to the stress. The door creaked open behind him.

“I had to take that,” the president said as he sat down again. He didn’t move it back forward. “If the earnings call wasn’t in a week, I’d fire you right now. As it stands, however, we need you working on those budget allowances, so you’ll be allowed to stay for now. Don’t let this happen again!” With that, the president of the Corporate Alliance of Banking began scooting his chair back towards his desk. Tony stood up and scurried out of the office. Mr. Michaelson was waiting just outside.

“So, how’d it go?” he asked, as he fell in step with Tony.

Tony took several deep breaths. “Oh, it was fine.”

Michaelson smiled. “Great! So can I count on you for the halloween party too? This time I’ll quadruple your monthly pay.” His face fell just a little as Tony shook his head. The Tony’s shoulders began to bounce, and he burst out laughing. He put an arm around Michaelson’s shoulders.

“The sky’s the limit!” he promised between chuckles. The two giggled in the elevator, thoroughly confusing the clerk who was also inside. They laughed all the way down to the first floor.



Big | Allegra Hayward

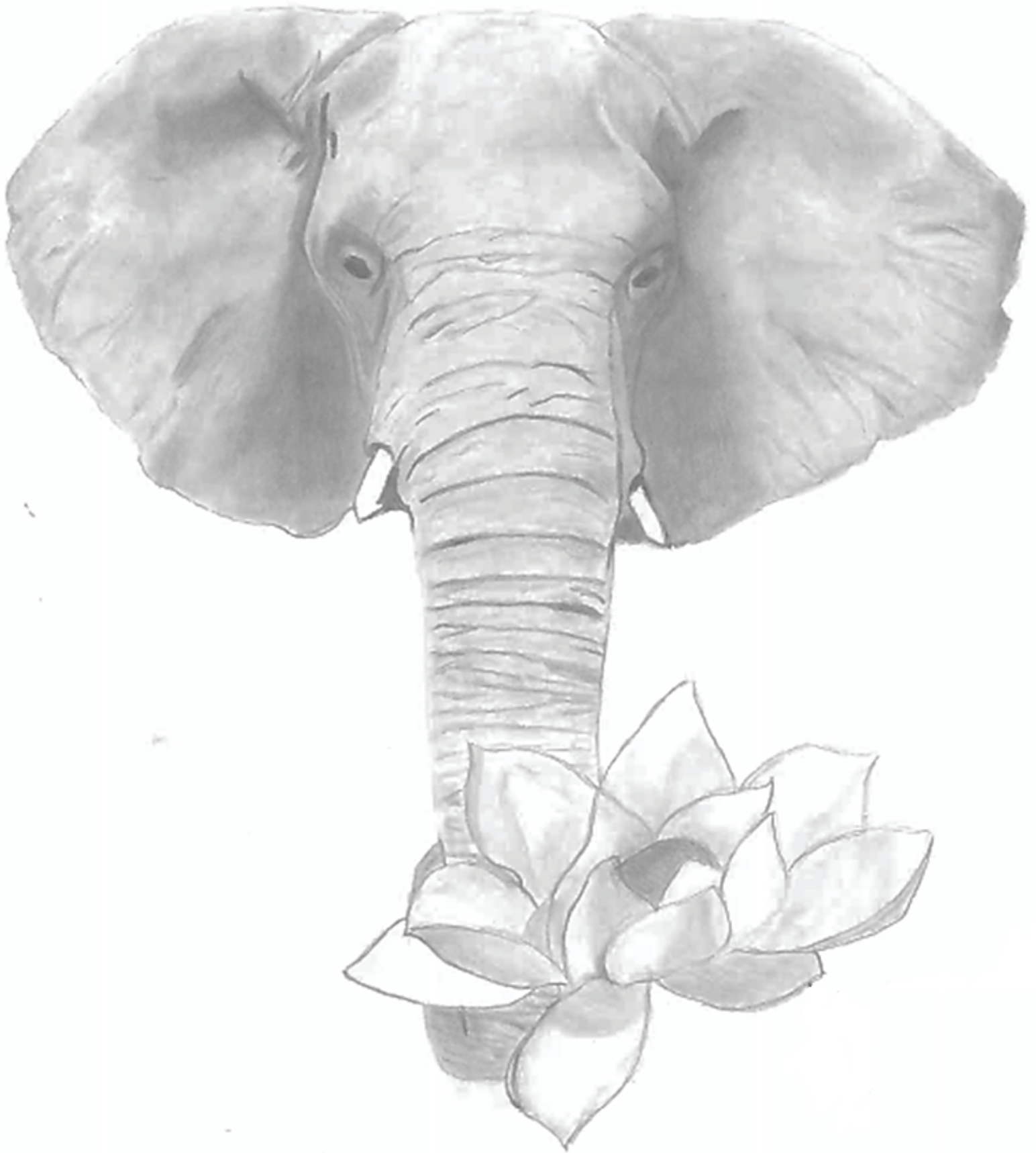


# I will always...

Chace Huntzinger

1. Check the shower before turning it on
2. Eat at Taco Bell
3. Slow down when I see a cop
4. Wear a belt with pants that have loops
5. Check to see when the refrigerator light turns off
6. Question dogs' motives
7. Learn about history
8. Shave before an interview
9. Remain hesitant before picking up a baby
10. Sing to Call Me Maybe
11. Root for the Red Sox
12. Doubt my citations
13. Hate taxes
14. Ask for extra napkins
15. Use humor to diffuse troubling scenarios
16. Read the news
17. Get haircuts when I go home
18. Laugh
19. Appreciate oatmeal
20. Think my playlists are the best lists
21. Question my mental health
22. Pretend I know more than I do
23. Love Inside Out
24. Tie my shoes before walking in them
25. Write





# 0.001 of a Second

or

When I Almost  
(Accidentally) Shot  
Myself in the Head

(An Excerpt)

By George Jameson Courville

I remember when the Glock 19's trigger spring dunked the nine millimeter bullet's primer into its blackpowder charge. A sharp metal clank rang out—the shock ignited a war inside the cartridge-brass casing, and expanding gases thrust 115 grams of copper plated lead on an adventure down the four-inch-barrel's rifling. I felt my heart—thump thump, thumping adrenaline as the shockwave struck my eardrums—it soured my arteries, the adrenaline, and drowned the muscle fibers at my finger tips with a nervous energy that weakened their grasp on the Glock 19's textured grip. I felt my lungs decompress, as if someone twisted their windpipe's valve wide open and sucked my reservoirs dry. In dire need, I drew in a sharp gulp of desert Idaho air. It tasted like sandpaper, and clawed at the back of my throat—scratching, scraping, abrading the soft tissue at the back of my throat. Agitation radiated my chest. The heat traveled through my blood, blistering every nerve ending as it branched up the capillaries under my forehead, nape, and shoulder blades—driven through that tenuous layer between me and the flesh that makes me, and not me—until the heat erupted at my skin. It stung every inch of its surface as the sweat oozed out like lava. Thump,

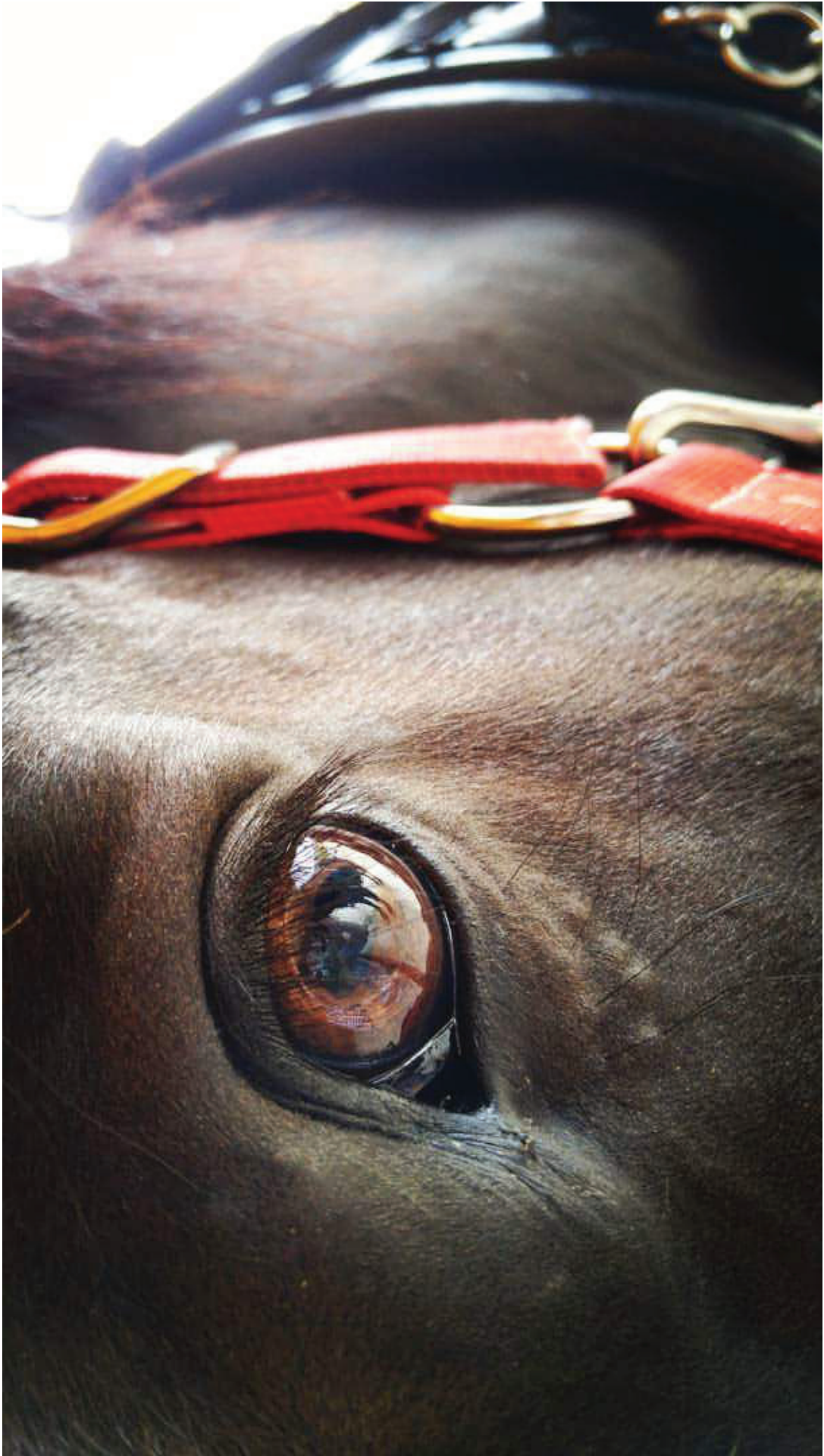


thump, thumping my red-hot blood. Salty sweat beads percolated at my underarms. My brain burned at its synapses. The Glock 19 kicked its butt against my wrist, bucking my bones and compressing the cartilage between. It wiggled free of my left hand's grasp. I fumbled and felt the weight of the gun fall. A flash burst at the muzzle—I furled my nose. My jaw clenched, and I raised my left cheek—I closed one eye to protect its retina—I remember that. A cloud of heat burned my left hand's fingertips. The Glock 19's ejection port flew wide open, and the spent cartridge-brass casing lobbed its way to freedom, whooshing past my nose. It whizzed across my open eye, shimmering above my globe like Halley's Comet whipping a dreadful tail. Smoke exuded from the casing's open edge where the bullet and several grains of black-powder used to wait, and it left an oily charcoal scent that crawled up my nostrils. And that's when I felt the wake. The bullet departed its barrel at 1500 feet per second—in a second, it would shoot past five football fields, the roof height of the Empire State Building plus 250 feet, or the entire length of the Seawise Giant; at 1503 feet, it was the largest oil tanker ever constructed by man. By the time it would fall south, the lead engine would clear all those obstacles, twice. It shot past my scrunched up face, a finger-widths distance from my skin and skull at 1500 feet per second muzzle velocity. The disturbed air flustered the split-ends of my dirty-blond hair and slapped my bare brown eye with dust. When the Glock 19 struck the ground, my brain resumed to think. Had the safety been off? That much should have been obvious but I remember asking it.

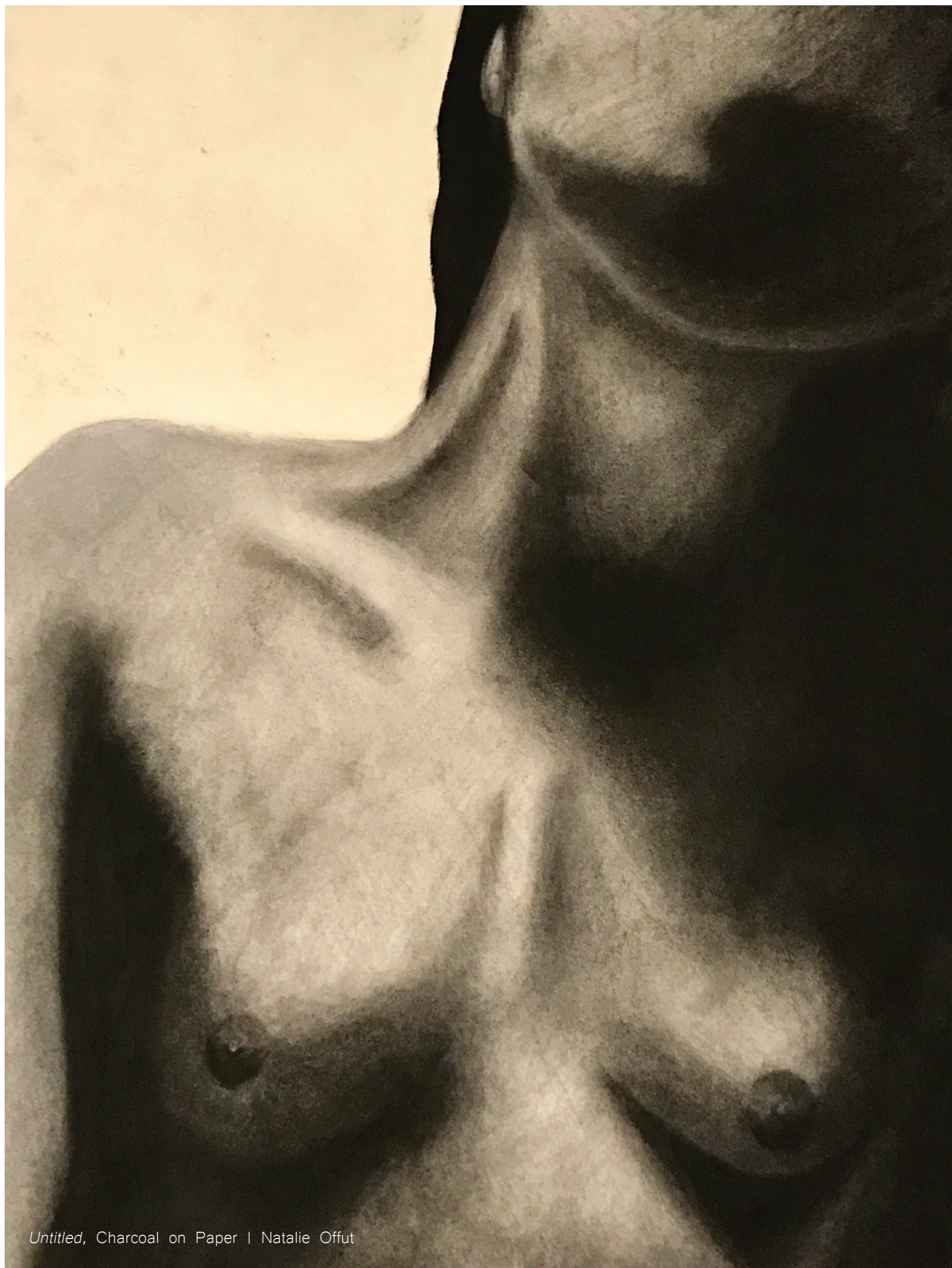
Mom said Grandpa tuned his guns with hair-triggers. He was an award winning trap shooter when my mom was young, but as his years droned forward, arthritis inflamed the joints in his hand, and had stiffened his movements. It stifled him and his attitude. Grandfather complained of pain, and claimed to whoever was near enough to hear him, that it was my Kenyan President's fault, because the democrats wanted gun reform, and therefore they were trying to take away my Grandfather's guns. My index finger, as lanky as my 18 year old body was, must have felt like tidal-wave energy to the tuned Glock 19's hair-trigger mechanism when I picked it up. And when I brought it close to my face, to scrutinize the weight, the steel, the textured grip, I must've rested my left index finger on the trigger. **KABLAM.** No one was home at redneck riviera that day. That's what my mother had taken to calling my Grandfather's acreage, which lied about twenty minutes outside of Buhl, Idaho. Twenty years ago, he had filled up his first gun safe, and never thought to purchase a second vault as his firearm collection ballooned. Instead, my grandfather had it in his head that the end of free and legal gun ownership was nigh—and with his rights threatened, had prepared Obama and his G-men a healthy dose of semi-automatic served lead should they decide to invade redneck riviera. He left guns strewn on the coffee table in the living room, two loaded AR-15s with two more loaded magazines should the firefight get out of hand. In the pool room, Grandfather had built a billiard table to carry his shotguns—too many to count, but I remember a 20 gauge with a stained oak grip and stock, and a black as

night barrel. In his office, there was a desk with a Mac Pro whose browser was open to some conservative news website. Next to the mousepad was where I had found the Glock 19. After it had hit the ground—a white carpet—I remember that I couldn't hear, save for a high pitch scream inside my left eardrum, and a buzz inside my brain. I had to get out. No one was home to hear the shot. I tripped my way through grandfather's office, past the open gun safe, into the pool room with the shotguns and that 20 gauge, fell my way up the stairs into the living room where I glimpsed the two AR-15s waiting for a firefight. I fumbled my way to the door, and clawed at the handle for what felt like an eternity, until I said fuck it and just kicked it open and fell forward into the hot grass. No one was home to hear the shot. Kneeling there, I felt a warmth in my chest and thought for a moment that I'd been hit, but it was nothing more than excess adrenaline flooding my flesh. Am I dead? Have I died? Am I dead? My thoughts devolved, starved. But then I felt that sun beating down on me, forcing my eyes into a squint. The Idaho pollen funneled its way up my nostrils till I had to sneeze—and I was alive.









*Untitled*, Charcoal on Paper | Natalie Offut