

CAESURA

University of Delaware Literary Annual

41

2021 III 2022

Caesura

(sī-zyur'-ə) n. pl -suras, -surae

In modern prosody: *usually a rhetorical break in the flow of sound in the middle of a line of verse.* Greek and Latin prosody: *a break in the flow in the middle of sound in a verse by the ending of a word within a foot.* Break, interruption. A pause making a rhythmic point of division in a melody.

Caesura is the University of Delaware English Department's student Literary Annual. Work is submitted, selected, and edited by an all-student staff. All submissions are considered for publication anonymously.

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issue
41

2021 III **2022**

Published by the University of Delaware English Department

Dedication

This year's *Caesura* is dedicated to the memory of Starke John Gregory, a friend and longtime supporter of the creative literary arts at the University of Delaware. His support of students will be cherished and remembered fondly by the many students and faculty whose lives he touched. The English Department will be forever grateful for his generosity and his warm interest in our students and their writing.

Acknowledgments

Caesura is made possible by a generous donation from the Gregory family. The staff of *Caesura* would especially like to remember Arthur and Mary Jane Gregory for their generosity in supporting this literary magazine and helping it to flourish. Additionally, we would like to thank Andrea Schoen-Gregory and Gary Schoen, and Starke and Elizabeth Gregory for their continuing support and dedication to creative writing at the University of Delaware. Many thanks to John Ernest, Chair of the English Department, for his ongoing and enthusiastic support of creative writing, and to Ann Marie Green, for her administrative help with all things *Caesura*. Thanks as well to graphic designer Mark Deshon for his keen eye and steady hand.

Judges

Niki Herd is the author of the poetry collection *The Language of Shedding Skin*, and co-editor of *Laura Hershey: On the Life & Work of an American Master*. Her chapbook, _____, *don't you weep*, is forthcoming from Sting & Honey Press. Herd's poetry, essays, and criticism appear in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, *New England Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Academy of American Poets (Poem-a-Day)*, *Lit Hub*, *The Rumpus*, *Obsidian*, and *Tupelo Quarterly*, among other journals and anthologies. Her work has been supported by the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Ucross, the Newberry Library, and Cave Canem. Herd earned her PhD in Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Houston. She lives in St. Louis where she is a Visiting Writer in Residence in Poetry at Washington University.

Denise Eno Ernest creates abstract, dimensional works using several distinct techniques. Building actual three-dimensional shapes that attach to her paintings or by using mixed media to create a three-dimensional landscape to her work, she creates visual and tactile paintings in a language all her own. Denise was awarded the 2021 Emerging Professional Artist Fellowship in Painting from the Delaware Division of the Arts, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts. Her works were shown at the Biggs Museum of American Art in Dover, Del., the Camp Rehoboth Gallery in Rehoboth Beach, Del., and a one-woman exhibitions at the Mezzanine Gallery in Wilmington, Del., and the University of Delaware's Recitation Hall Gallery. Her past exhibitions include the Oxford Art Alliance 6th Annual National Exhibition, a two-artist exhibition in Ithaca, N.Y., as well as exhibiting her work in conjunction with a local play. Her work was featured in a one-woman exhibition in Winston-Salem, N.C., and was also accepted in several juried shows there.

Awards

The Elda Wollaeger Gregory Poetry Award*

“Portrait of Woman Without Reasons” by Dominique Kendus

“The Elm” by Emily Principe

Academy of American Poets Harold Taylor Prize

“Ode to Reynier Leyva Novo” by David Haynes

The Thomas W. Molyneux Fiction Award

“Paid in Life” by Daniel W. Larlham Jr.

The Thomas W. Molyneux Creative Nonfiction Award

“From Frozen Aisle to Table” by Ankita Prasad

Caesura Art Award

“Flora Reflection” by Anna Keating

**named in honor of Arthur's first wife*

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Molly Ferguson

Isabella Shannon

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Contributors

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Viet Dinh

Claire McCabe

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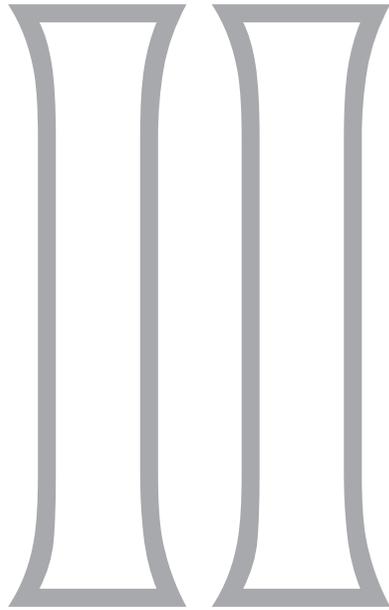
*Flora Reflection

Photograph by Anna Keating



**Award Winner*

POETRY



Strangers

Katherine Reim

"Hi, Mom,"
startles my swallowing.
she's nameless to me
but asks about lunch.
i am skimming the edges
of a faded memory.
soup.

"How was your morning today?"
morning? what is morning?
i play with buttons instead of answering.
small black ones four holes
i like buttons.

"I heard you had a holiday party last night!"
yes. it was cold and
too long. i've been here too long.

"when am i getting out?"

"Your walk is at noon, Mom."

is that what i meant? "who's taking me?"

"Nurse Shana."

oh. okay. good.
i don't like to walk
with strangers.

The Heartwood

Annika Stein

Is pale, hard, straight grained
and **exempt of any deteriorations**
or sawing mistakes.

It's durable in damp soils

I want us to be like heartwood.

I don't want much
Just the whole world
Just want to breathe you under water
Want our tobacco to be without tar
Want the rain on us to be Sprite
And when we walk home at night
Drunk

I want the sky to be clear from clouds

Look

I even hung up the moon in the sky for you

I don't want **much**

Just want us to be like heartwood

that can be **used for building poles, posts, and heavy constructions**

They even use it for **charcoal production**

And we're like that, right? Adaptable to any use, I asked

But you said you didn't want to be **used to light the fire**

Would've rather wanted to float away

fully soaked in the river's *water*

we used to swim in only a few memories earlier

A wavy grained texture with subtle cracks and numerous knots

All as pretty as the bow tie I'd have worn at our wedding ((Pause))

Your shining aura must've played a joke on me

when you stepped out of the shower covered in foggy clouds

that had beckoned me in to rest my spirit

And when I look at your warm, wet skin **now**, the only things I see
are the weary and soaked heartwood piles floating down the river.
I realize their soil was conserved in hilly areas.
Maybe I should switch my **place of vegetation**
One without as much **erosion**

Columns of European White Marble or, If Racism Was Measured in Marbles

David Haynes

He flooded my bar with marbles every time he spoke,
Each glass sphere paradiddling off eardrums differently.

Some smiled seeing
A familiar photograph
Nobody remembered developing,
Tucked away in a forever scrapbook.

Others ran into the ugliest season—
A Summer that never showered,
A Spring that always awoke hungover,
A Fall that forgot to show,
Or a Winter that overstayed its welcome.

“You know what holds up the White House?”
You could smell his vodka voice.
And taste his cigarette sentences
Yet,
People listened.

He was him because of the glass rain pouring
Out of his mouth and onto the tiled floor.
And most people weren't because their lips
Built a wall
Keeping the forecast to cloudy with a chance—
But always a chance.

“When do your words start becoming you?”
Some words asked.
He argued
And neither walked away
Feeling any differently.

“It’s better to use them than to lose them,”
I heard amongst the downpours.
“*Lose what?*” he replied,
As I swept the marble floors.

*Ode to Reynier Leyva Novo

David Haynes

yo encuentro

a little red book
 hanging
stained on a bleached exhibit wall
above a tombstone entitled
 El Peso de la Historia
real revolutions bleeding through its constant constitutions
 como una guayaba crucificada
censored with soot

cubierta covered
 como una bata
hovering in *la mano de humo*
 coughing
como half *de una alma fumando*

En el aire
crispily-turned whispers crescendo
me lean
 me lean

lo abro

palpitating panic and *palabras* as silent as a posthumous attic
 published prematurely
freezing to rust in a cell
 órganos inflamados and fleeting freedom fights
incendiary scenes seen *sonámbulando* through the night
 el papel en llamas es
 el papel de papel
 read from a roll of paper
hermano batido con un béisbol bat
 split-rhythm splattered on enclosing walls

The Shadows

Austin Post

I *hate* to pity myself.

I *hate* sitting in this darkness waiting for sleep.

The shadows crawl and scratch against the walls in my room. They
scratch at my skin until blood cakes under my fingernails.

They lick the blood I draw, using it as fuel for their next attack. And
they love to attack.

They love it.

They kick me in the ribs, driving me to the floor as they beat the air
from my lungs.

After, they hold me in a terrifying embrace. They hold me tight. So
tight I can't breathe. So tight my face turns red. And I keep trying to
breathe, but I just can't fight them off.

I can't.

I get enough oxygen to survive, but not enough to live.

I can't live with them. But they don't want me to die; they want me to
suffer.

They tease death but never allow the sweet release.

I was taught a man shouldn't cry. But I cry.

The shadows revel in my tears and insignificance.

And, I keep trying to push them away. Sometimes I can for a few days.

But they always come back.

They come back hungrier each time.

Hungry for my fears and regrets.

Hungry for my cries.

Then I pour myself a drink.

For a short time, I forget the war. I forget the last battle I fought. I
forget the last battle I lost.

My gaze grows foggy as the comfort of forgetfulness warms my body—
a warm, familiar caress.

I want to forget everything. Everything, *please*.

Then the shadows are back.
And they don't leave until the next day when I pour myself another.
Each day my glass is fuller. Each day it isn't enough. I'm not enough.
Nothing is *ever* enough....
But the shadows won't let me die.

They push me to the edge.
They hang me from the cliff, let me see the darkness below.
They dangle me, make me beg. But they never drop me.

I am overpowered, for my life is not my own.
Will I forever be trapped in this cold bed, waiting for sleep? Will the
shadows ever leave?
I believe I may soon break free, but in doing so, I will fall from the
edge.

One Small Victory for a Recovering Bulimic

Katherine Reim

Green juice enters my mouth and I hold it there.
I don't swallow.
Instead, I let the flavors peak and fight
the internal voice that screams:
more, More, MORE!
I control the urge. Slow it down.
The liquid resolves and I pause to enjoy the sugar,
allowing the spinach and apple residue to rest willingly on my
tongue.
I notice how my heartbeat pulses,
how managing my meals fatigues me,
but I am doing the right hard thing.
I take a deep breath and swallow the juice,
because this time I know
I won't taste it twice.

*Portrait of Woman Without Reasons

Dominique Kendus

at dusk I feel closest to nothing
like the intersection between
memory and dream

my hands are heavy from the shovel
too many burials
and buriers

does a body decay
if it has no reason
to stay together

and if the body decays
without reasons
then who is left to bury it

and who is left to remember
and who is left to dream
about me

my mother once told me
I felt things too much
and now I feel closest to nothing

All the Way to Eve

Dominique Kendus

Out of the rib came Eve
And so came I,
And so came this grief

I feel it in my chest
Heaving, erupting, collapsing
Breaking off into another sin

And who am I
But a woman made of sin
And fractured bone

My hands sticky and stained
From the maple wax
And apple core

I sink my teeth into all that pains me
And become my mother, my grandmother,
All the way to Eve.

GFP

Illustration by Prabhsimar Singh



Reassignment

Ollie Miller

When I tell my mother the body she made me grew up wrong
She hears I want to erase her daughter and replace them with a “son.”
Some unnatural and sexless corrupted offspring,
Wandering the woods hairy and hungry,
Blood in its mouth mingling with the skin from its past life

Claws long and dragging, leaving a trail
for every hunter of beasts to follow;
Some man/woman/thing,
kicked from a mother’s embrace to trip, keening, through tight packed
pines,
Scraping against bark and brambles and brushwoods

Home to nothing: chest a gaping, oozing open wound,
Heart left on its mother’s doorstep to be brushed aside in the morning
with the fallen leaves,
To be buried by decaying debris,
To continue beating and keep its mother up at night with the noise,
A living ghost, haunting specter and twisted reflection of a perfect
daughter

A message for a mother:

You can kill your child, but you can’t forget their name.

To My Ex

Sophia Johnson

So much of what I did was stop
what you tried to start again and again.

Perturbed, sore narrator, telling your “token” story.
it’s asbestos to the lungs.

Shovel the bad stew of regret
down my throat;
please cancel my subscription to this sick joke.
Sweep the leaves of change till they pile up to—

Can’t lose the attitude?
Really?
Forget it.
Be mean, heathen.
See if I care!
I hate your beard, it’s misshapen.

Lower your voice,
“Stop, or I’ll tweet,” you said,
“What happened, happened,” you said.
Count your blessings, okay? It had to end.

New love is pain but
I refuse to ask for your guidance.

Cross the rill to maturity, walk down
the route to complexion.
Grasp responsibility by the wrist,
realize that you need it.

You never could be
what I needed you to be,
And the day I realized that
Was the day my lungs cleared up.

The Epigraph Placed Before Elisha's Dry Bones

Nana Ohemaa Asante

These bones speak with no tongues,
with no muscles or tendons stretched tautly.
These bones speak with no skin to identify with,
to identify against, to abhor, to fetishize, or to adore.
No more please. These bones speak with no stutter;
they do not hesitate. They have no obligation to lie.
These bones speak with no lungs, nor blood to clot,
or electric shocks that cause their chest to butterfly.

These bones speak
like a metamorphosis.

These bones speak
with fragments and fractures: glass shards painted like a mosaic. *Hisssssssss*
like they have something to fear. They forecast something ominous,
something severe.
These bones may communicate, but it is only curses that they cast upon
themselves.
Once soul and now gravel, these stones sing praises while truly seeking
death.
These stones are fools. Do not pray to them for deliverance.

Quicksand Along the Riverbank

Nana Ohemaa Asante

"We tend to be stuck in a time loop with the memories of pain given to us by [our] loved ones."

—Lisa Gupta

Until we wake up and trip again,
the rat's slimy belly and the leaves
will clench the edges of the bank.

I prayed to transform into a fish
gliding through the stream, but I drowned instead.
I scoured the shore for signs of a drought,
but the weeds created fantasies that cradled my head further into the sand.
I fished, but nothing came up.
The river ran wet, then it forgot to run dry.

We talked under sunlight and starlight and moonlight
and artificial light, but never when it was dark.
That was too honest, and we were only strangers, strange family,
estranged daughters to nightwalkers.

I crawled on unbruised bellies
as if I never crawled before.
I crawled so much my fingers turn scraggly and my nails dulled while you
strolled peacefully beside me and eventually began to leave me behind.
I begged you to peel me away from the leaves
that clung to the edges of the bank.

Instead, you step on me with all of your weight
until I wake up and trip again.

*The Elm

Emily Principe

November plunges into the winter chill
Sleeping down six feet through the dirt, deep,
Deep enough to form frost along my bones

Rested years beyond life in what is thought of after
In a place thought to be beyond, but not still
And I still wait

I wait for the years to pass, for the flesh to melt off of me
Buried under the roots of an old elm tree
Waiting for the outer layers of who I once was to reveal a truer self

And as I wait, I wonder if death is worth it
If there was meaning in longing for otherworldly answers, for visions
 long gone
For dreams to become reality

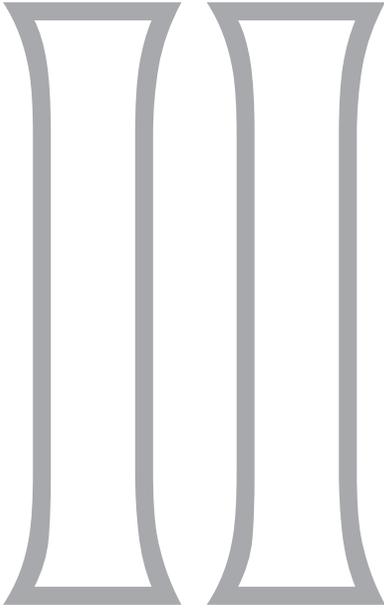
The first snow touches the ground, frozen fractals threaten my final
 resting place
I wonder if the water from the snow will carry on into the elm
To then give it the life that I had once held
And when the elm too passes, where will the water go?

Confession

Illustration by Prabhsimar Singh



CREATIVE
NONFICTION



*From Frozen Aisle to Table

Ankita Prasad

My family and I used to have a garden. Our house had not one, but two large backyards—the first of which used to be home to Frisbee games, picnics, neighborhood get-togethers, and the occasional family campout. In the far backyard, hidden from the neighborhood, our garden sat on a perfect little grass mound. Often, my father would bring me outside, and we would tend to it together. After long school days that left me swamped with homework, I would complain that I was too tired to help, but he would beg me to join him.

“Come with me, it’ll be fun! You can pick all the tomatoes,” he would say enticingly. He knew how much I loved surprising my mother with a crate full of juicy tomatoes. In retrospect, I think he yearned for some quality time with me that we didn’t otherwise get. Eventually, I would give in and join him.

That tiny garden was my father’s passion. He poured his heart and soul into it and treated it as if it were his child—with the same level of care, attention, and love as he raised my brother and me. Together, we grew cherry tomatoes, plum tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, eggplant, cayenne peppers, and, at one point, even a watermelon—the seedlings for which I helped him select at our local plant shop, along with some flowers for our front yard, of which my mother was particularly fond. Occasionally, my older brother would abandon his video games and come outside to help. While my jobs usually involved planting the seedlings in the ground, running the hose, or sprinkling fertilizer over the soil, my brother helped my father set up wire supports around the plants and used the wheelbarrow to transfer compost from our pile to the garden. We all often grew frustrated after finding huge deer bitemarks in several plum tomatoes along with rabbit bitemarks in the lettuce, but eventually learned to laugh about it, figuring that at least the animals approved of the taste. Over time, the garden morphed from a place of outdoor labor into a place for my father and me to chat and temporarily escape from school and work stress. After a hard day’s work, my dad would give my brother and me a wheelbarrow ride back to the house, and we’d share a glass of ice cold orange juice. Then, in the evening, we’d sit down to an amazing dinner that my mother had concocted, filled with the (literal) fruits of our labor.

Cuisine is an enormous aspect of Indian culture. When most people think of India, the first thing that comes to mind is the food. Butter chicken, naan bread, samosas, and lamb curry are some of the country's most popular dishes and are commonly found in Indian restaurants here. However, I didn't grow up with these buttery and fried North Indian dishes.

Contrary to meat-heavy North Indian cuisine, South Indian cuisine is largely centered around rice, lentils, stews, and vegetables. A large majority of South Indians, including my own father, are vegetarian and, therefore, relies on these staple ingredients in order to obtain their protein and nutrients. My mother's nightly cooking was always vegetarian so as to satisfy his needs; so, our garden definitely served us well. Our dinners would include chapati (flatbread) with a vegetable sabzi (either beans, potatoes, peppers, or other starchy ingredients cooked with oil and spices), fresh salad, rice with a classic homemade tomato stew called "rasam," and, since even Indians aren't immune to spice, some plain yogurt to balance it all. As I grew up watching my mother transform our home-grown vegetables into cucumber and tomato salad, sabzis, and countless curries, my father's affection for our garden (as well as his tendency to hiccup after our spicy dinners) eventually rubbed off on me. I, too, began to see our small backyard patch as a child that needed love and protection.

As times have changed and we have all grown older and busier, the smell of freshly cut tomatoes in our kitchen has been replaced with store-bought sauce. A few years ago, my father was promoted at work to an administration position. This has since caused his workdays to increase in length twofold, with an ever-growing list of emails to answer and an entire department to run. Additionally, over these past few years, my brother and I moved out of the house for college; he now works a full-time job, while I am almost halfway through my senior year of undergrad. Our absence from the house and adult responsibilities, combined with my father's work overload and lack of spare time, led us to abandon our little garden. What were once tall plant stalks with an array of colorful produce are now weeds and dead grass, and it has been

this way for over ten years now. Our freezer is constantly stuffed with pre-prepared meals from our local Indian market, and my mother now picks our vegetables, not from a garden plant, but off of grocery store shelves. She and my father used to hand-make our chapatis, but nowadays those too are purchased from the frozen aisle. Looking back, I've realized how our garden was not only a source of fresh vegetables for my family, but also served as a way for us all to bond—whether in the garden itself or at the dinner table.

My family's interest in food and farm-fresh cooking has deep roots in India. Flying into Chhatrapati Shivaji airport in Mumbai, the first sight that comes into view is always the slums: rows upon rows of tiny huts covered with makeshift roofs, each usually congested with a large family. Women walk through the shelters balancing buckets of water or baskets of clothes on their heads. Relentless sheets of rain fall when I visit in summer due to the monsoons, creating muddy slush everywhere, and I often observe slum dwellers bathing in these natural showers. With its overwhelming population of over one billion people and flimsy huts crowded together in any given direction, an American would probably never suspect that India is an agricultural powerhouse. Contrary to American farmers' use of large-scale, heavy industrial machinery and high-tech pesticide distributors, Indian farmers rely on traditional methods like ox-drawn plowing and agroforestry that are much more labor intensive. An Indian farmer is not found with sturdy rubber boots and a giant tractor, but instead dons simple white cotton clothes and a spade. Despite its hands-on approach to farming, India ranks as the second largest producer of fruit, wheat, rice, and vegetables and is the world's top producer of milk and legumes.

In Mumbai, fresh produce from local farms is delivered right to my family's doorstep. Throughout my grandmother's neighborhood, countless tables of fresh carrots, potatoes, green beans, tomatoes, onions, beets, cucumbers, and gourds line the streets. Whenever any member of my family there needs vegetables, he/she simply stops on the side of the road, whether driving or walking, and purchases them fresh off the street. During my most recent visit to India in late 2019, my father

marveled one night at the fresh taste of a popular dish called “palak paneer,” which my aunt had prepared. It’s mostly made of fresh spinach, onions, herbs, and cubes of Indian cottage cheese.

“Wow, there’s so much more flavor than back home,” he said. “Everything is so fresh here.” He kept commenting on how different it tasted from the frozen version that we often purchase from our Indian market. Intrigued, I took my first bite, and my tastebuds were immediately flooded with distinctive flavors and textures—from the tenderness of the cheese to the light and slightly sweet taste of the fresh spinach. Like my dad, I proceeded to inhale my meal in a matter of minutes. My aunt’s version of palak paneer brought back poignant memories of how fresh my family’s dinners used to taste back in our gardening days and uncovered my deep desire to return flavor to our food.

Back here in Newark, I’ve recently found myself gardening again—not with my father, but with Ann Morrison. I recently joined Lori’s Hands, a Newark-founded organization that pairs University of Delaware students with elder clients in need of physical help around their homes. Ann, my client, suffered from metallosis (blood poisoning from toxic metals) after a double hip-replacement that she underwent thirteen years ago. Every so often, my partner and I visit her at her house to help tend to her huge garden and, more recently in the cold weather, cook meals from her home-grown vegetables. Using just the plants in Ann’s garden to cook spaghetti squash with homemade pesto—“liquid gold,” as she calls it—was definitely a learning experience for someone like me who microwaves Trader Joe’s frozen meals most nights of the week.

My experiences in India, along with my time spent helping Ann and forming a genuine friendship with her through her garden and farm-fresh meals, have inspired me to cut down on the processed food that I so heavily rely on as a college student. I never really bothered to closely observe my mother cooking while growing up, but recently I have been making more of an effort to learn what exactly went into my food for so many years and made me who I am. It deeply saddens me that my

family has fallen victim to America's processed food and imported grocery-store vegetables. To me, our garden was more than a place to grow and harvest home-grown produce. It did more than just put fresh vegetables on our dinner table. It was an escape from the pressures of everyday life and the glue that once held my family, especially my father and me, so tightly together. I deeply miss the days of being young and carefree, following my father to the garden and helping him carry a basket of harvested crops inside for my mother to see. The sights and flavors of all the colorful vegetables in India, the taste of fresh palak paneer and homemade basil pesto, and memories of me and my father's laughter during backyard wheelbarrow rides all inspire me to bring life back to our little garden.

Ice Crystal

Photograph by Anna Keating



The Boneyard

Hannah Slesinski

During one of my first weeks interning at Lakeside Wildlife Hospital, I stepped outside into the cool morning to deliver a tray of birdseed and blueberries to some fledgling birds who were recovering in one of our outdoor flight cages. Standing in the hospital driveway right outside the front doors, I encountered a frantic, crying young woman. She was cradling a small baby deer in her arms and began walking toward me.

“Do you work here?” she yelled to me, the fawn’s lanky limbs sticking up in her face. She was holding the deer as you would a baby. The woman in the driveway was nearly incoherent in her speech, but in between sobs I was able to pick out the words “hit by a car” and “I couldn’t leave her.”

Normally, I was not responsible for handling this sort of thing, as I was more of a behind-the-scenes worker. I was taught to direct animal intakes, especially large animals, to the highly trained and experienced staff, while I focused on tasks such as cleaning and feeding. This particular day, however, I couldn’t bear to leave them. I walked forward, dropping the bird food on the ground. The woman explained that she watched a large white van hit the fawn in her neighborhood and promptly drive off. What’s worse, the fawn’s mother was watching the whole thing from close by.

The deer was wrapped in a colorful beach towel, and, at a closer glance, I could see it was stained with large patches of blood. I asked the woman to transfer the dying fawn into my arms. Her small body was limp and heavy, and her long, thin neck escaped the woman’s makeshift swaddle. The deer’s head drooped lifelessly over my arms, her nose dripping warm blood onto my dirty shoes. I felt her forced heavy breathing as she stared at me with complete and utter helplessness. She was alive, but barely. In her eyes, I could see the sweet being that she was—a kindred spirit who hadn’t even had a chance at life. I felt a connection to her as she struggled in my arms, and I could feel her rapid heart rate boom against my body.

“Thank you for coming,” I said to the young woman, holding back my

own tears. “We will do everything we can for her.” The woman looked sad but relieved, and she was hopeful the deer would recover in the hospital.

“Will she be reunited with her mother? Once you heal her?” she asked, almost pleading.

As my mind raced, I gave her some hopeful, optimistic reply that I had been trained to give. I knew full well that this fawn had a mere few minutes of life left in her. There would be no saving her.

As I carried the deer away from the driveway and toward the staff doors of the hospital, I suddenly felt a strange vibration. The fawn’s eyes had rolled back into her head, and her legs went completely rigid. Soon after, I felt something warm soak into my scrubs, and a foul odor affronted my nose. She had lost all control of her bowels. She was seizing in my arms.

I pushed open the doors of the hospital and watched about a dozen volunteers scramble around the cluttered rooms to get out of my way.

“I have a seizing fawn,” I yelled to the rest of the interns. “Someone please find me a staff member and have them meet me in the basement.”

Immediately, another intern went to find someone to help, and another opened the door to the basement for us. As I carried her down the stairs, I could still feel my/her heartbeat echoing her/my own. The seizure was coming to an end as I laid her on top of a stainless steel chest freezer, which we sometimes used as a makeshift observation table. I gently placed her onto the cold metal, and I unwrapped the deer from the bloodstained towel, revealing a host of traumatic injuries. I took a step back. Before me lay a horrified, innocent, and beautiful creature fighting in a futile attempt to live the rest of her short life. My heart broke, and I laid a towel over her eyes in an effort to calm her. I cursed the van driver’s carelessness.

Seconds later, I heard the pounding footsteps of my supervisor running down the stairs. She gave me a sad look as she noticed the tears falling down my cheeks. She glanced at the fawn sympathetically, but after experiencing this hundreds of times, she seemed unphased.

“You know what we have to do, right?” she asked.

I nodded. She handed me a fawn-sized nasal mask stuffed with cotton balls that were soaked with horse tranquilizer. I shakily positioned it over her mouth and nose, trying not to look into her panicked, perfect eyes. She kicked her broken legs in a pathetic attempt to fight the sedative. I thought of her mother and what she might be doing now that her daughter is gone. Do deer experience grief? I felt her body relax as she inhaled it. What would that young woman say if she saw what I was doing? Would she be understanding? Sad? Angry? The fawn’s body went limp. I released her from my tight hold. I thought of the van driver again, as the fawn was moved to another room. How many fawns have faced a similar fate? How many died slowly and alone? I hoped that the driver felt guilty, at least, but he probably didn’t. These things happen, right?

I followed my supervisor into the euthanasia room, and I assisted. I was too empty to cry.



The next day, my supervisor asked me if I would help dispose of the fawn’s body. Together, we ventured back down the stairs of the basement, and I looked back toward the large chest freezer. I noticed a bit of dried blood stuck on the corner that I must have missed when cleaning up. After the euthanasia, the body was placed into a large, plastic barrel—a makeshift coffin. Together, my supervisor and I lifted and loaded it into the back of a small golf cart. We started driving off into the woods, way past any area I had ever been to before.

As we drove, I could hear the plastic barrel rattling and bouncing

around behind us. I looked out into the vast green forest surrounding me, trying to drown out the sound. The cart passed hundreds of pitch pine trees that towered over the path and dozens of large blueberry bushes, all full of ripe berries. The woods were teeming with birdlife, which was evident by their many songs, and I noticed squirrels and chipmunks running through the leaf litter, startled by the loud golf cart invading their otherwise tranquil homes. I thought of the deer that lived here and got to enjoy this forest.

My pondering was intruded by a rancid stench. The barrel's lid burst open after a bump, unleashing the putrid smell of rot.

“Good Lord,” my supervisor laughed and pinched her nose, somehow finding amusement during this morbid drive. “Please hop out and close that.”

She slowed the golf cart to a stop, and I stepped out onto the sandy ground. I caught a glimpse of the fawn's dead body lying in a blue plastic casket. She had already begun to decay, and the barrel's interior and the fawn's soft fur were damp with bodily fluids. It got on my hands as I reattached the lid, and I gagged. I had a hard time finding things to laugh about after that.

I got back in the golf cart, and we finally made it to our destination. My supervisor and I carried the barrel off of the path and down to a secluded area. It was a beautiful place that was well shaded by tall trees, and I thought it was a fitting place to lay the deer to rest. As we walked, I was startled by a loud crunch under my boot. Lifting my foot, I realized I had crushed the skull of some small mammal. Dumbfounded, I began to notice animal bones everywhere I looked, and I had to carefully place my steps to avoid smashing them. We finally dumped the fawn's body onto an established pile of fawn bones. Her cold body flopped unceremoniously over top of them, and I noticed a few vultures flying overhead. My stomach churned.

“Thanks for all of your help, Hannah,” my supervisor nonchalantly said,

kicking at a hawk skull with her boot. “We are going to need to start looking for another boneyard, I think. All of these bones are just from the last few months. Are you ready to head back?”

The ride back was silent and contemplative. I looked back out into the marvelous forest surrounding us. I prayed that the fawn’s mother was surviving out there somewhere. I wasn’t sure what the afterlife entailed or if it even existed at all, but I hoped that the fawn’s spirit was free to enjoy the woods here. I hoped that, one day, the fawn really would be reunited with her mother, just like I told the crying woman. We arrived back at the hospital, and I watched a different intern carry in another half-dead fawn through the hospital doors. I mopped up the trail of blood drops it left behind as he carried down the basement stairs. Another skeleton for the boneyard.

The Plural of You, and the Singular of I: Self-Reflections Amidst a Pandemic

Mandrés Garrido

On my porch. In your tree house. Under the stars at 1:00 a.m. All these places where I loved you. All these places where I knew I was special to you. All these places I've walked away, wondering, "Did you feel the same?"

Every interaction is thought through. Every reaction is analyzed. That time you asked for a hug. How you always stare at me when we're surrounded by friends, laughing. A clinical process that gets repeated over and over again, a process that may never finish. Maybe it took too long, and we both lost interest. But I always wonder about the idea of you.

There were many others, and there will be many more. A fascination, a puzzle I'm solving. A game I'm forced to play, and sometimes think is the game worth it? How many times must I feel my heart beat a bit too fast when all these versions of you speak my name?

I've practiced holding eye contact. I'm pretty good at it now. I don't flinch when those brown eyes meet mine. Sometimes they're blue, or green. It's all the same. The many versions of you.

Never quite an obsession, but always longing.

My first memory of you is fleeting. You were older, by a bit. Taller. I was younger, and smaller. But I knew you. Even at that young age, I knew it was you.

The second time we met, you just moved into the neighborhood. Your skin color was the same as mine this time. I didn't know it was you, though. I was jealous of someone newer. Someone with the same skin color as mine, a better version of me. You joined them, you played the

games I sat out of—basketball, football—and sitting on the curb, I watched. Questions began running through my head. Sweaty, damp, tired, and yet time and time again you would make sure I was okay. I'm just sitting there, watching you. Of course, I'd be okay.

I was jealous of you. Jealous of the fact that you were normal. You didn't have to ask yourself questions and hide from the answers. *Or did you? Did you? Did you? Did...*

I swirled my finger in an unending pattern, building sandy-dirt walls within the curb. Mom's warning of ringworms rang weakly in my head as I built my castle to watch you in.



Maybe a year or two later, that castle was built, and I had shut you out. Outside the door I would never open. Sometimes you knocked, asked for me. But I didn't come out. Castles built from dirt turned to digital palaces I locked myself in. There were times I looked out from a window, urged on by the sound of a dribbling basketball. I began to hate this version of you, because I felt as if you had given up on me, but that wasn't the truth. I shut myself away. I had given up on you.

And the only thing that freed me was necessity. Back then, I used to wish it was you. Now, I'm just grateful for what you gave me.



Middle school was about the not-you's, and the not-me's. Being someone I wasn't was something I was unfortunately good at. Surrounding myself with not-you's was, unfortunately, something I had to do. Eventually, things fell into place. Learning that you can't escape from yourself, always trapped within the confines of your physical and mental being. Being not-me, was just me being....

And all the not-you's were just other people, also being. Existing,

willingly existing with me. It took me a while to learn that people are just people. When will this stop being a secret?



Discovering yourself is a constant process, because definitions are constantly changing. The way I exist is constantly changing. I get to choose the words I use to define myself. In middle school, entering high school, I would define myself as pansexual. Though I am mostly attracted to other guys, I find myself incidentally finding you in girls.

And I knew this, but my family didn't. They saw a young boy, scribbling the name Isaiah repeatedly, the intense attention given to any homosexual relationship portrayed on screen. The awkwardness of trying to hide. So why did they get to define me? To my older brother, I was a faggot. To my mom, I was a gay boy too scared to come out. To my dad, I was something he felt the need to change. How did everyone around me know who I was before I had the chance to learn that for myself? These definitions imposed on me began to tunnel my vision on who I was, because eventually, I saw myself the way they saw me. It stole an opportunity from me. The opportunity of figuring things out on my own. Realizations of the privilege cisgender, heterosexual people have. They're not told who they are. They get the privilege of not being asked, and simply existing.

In a family this large, it's hard to ignore the bits of conversation, the words that were a little bit too loud. These were the words I clung to, in order to reassess myself at every opportunity, in order to be the gay boy they would be okay with having. The gay boy that didn't wear makeup, or play with those girly things. The gay boy that dressed like a man. The gay boy that wasn't a bottom. A proper gay. An acceptable gay.

It wasn't until summer of 2016 that I attempted to come out on my own terms. In Austin, Texas, away from my family, in a place that housed just my best friend and me. A spontaneous decision that was years in the making, we made a pact to write out a message to our

mothers, of our simultaneous coming out the closet, and we would swap phones and send it. No hesitation, no over-thinking. Sent.

I came out as pansexual.

"I already know you're gay, sweetheart."

Explaining is tiring enough. I'm gay.



And for those next three years, I was a gay man. 'Cause, that's just what I'd be perceived as anyway. I mean, aren't we all guilty of just assuming everyone is straight? Is just being perceived as gay, in public spaces, equality? Even if I don't feel that gay best describes me?



Queer was another thing I learned about during those three years. I started applying it to myself. I am queer. No need to explain further, though I'm sure it leaves more people wondering. Queer, for them, is a predecessor of something they're more familiar with. But, for me, queer is enough. It's an answer all on its own. Where did I learn queer...?

Well, I'd heard of queer before. As a derogatory word. But like people, queer started to change. Spoken differently through the mouths of people who were different, something began to catch on. Queer was a word for those more comfortable leaving some things unanswered. At least, that's how I see it. Because when I say I am queer, it means I don't have to micromanage every part of my identity anymore. I don't have to explain things until someone is satisfied that my explanation can coexist with their idea of me.



I'm more comfortable with my being within the recent year. I've lost

some weight. I got my ears pierced. I'm thinking about getting a tattoo. Will you be pleased with this new me? This self-improved me? Someone who occasionally still questions themselves, who falls for people a little too fast. Someone who gets caught in the overthinking, who looks a little too intensely into your eyes. Someone who drank too much coffee yesterday and spontaneously decided to give himself a mullet.

Staring once again into his dark, amber eyes. Never seeing him blink. Skin the same color as mine. The same questions I have. The only person whose actions I don't need to over analyze.

Are you pleased with this?

And I imagine all the other questions I'd have in the future. But for now, I can answer this one.

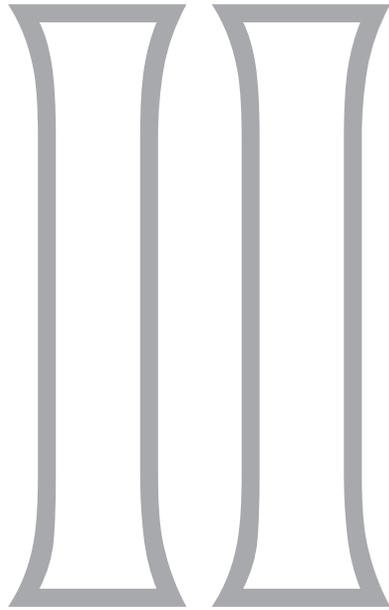
I am pleased with this.

GAP

Illustration by Prabhsimar Singh



FICTION



What Stephen Was Missing

Daniel W. Larlham Jr.

“Listen,” Stephen said, “this is important to me. You gotta stay quiet while I’m in here or you’re gonna fuck me up.”

Stephen opened the giant pane-glass door of the rather drab office complex. Through the ordinarily decorated lobby, Stephen was met by a female security guard and a male secretary sitting side by side at the front desk.

“Hi, yes. My name is Stephen, I’m here for a job interview at 1:30 with Short Stack Printing Company.... It might be under Steve?”

The security guard peered up at him with a look of suspicion while the secretary looked up the appointment. Stephen didn’t know why, but security guards always looked at him like that, like they saw something nefarious in him. It filled him with angst. In his head he heard a nervous groan that tickled his ear, a feeling with which he had become comfortable.

“Yes, Steve. 1:30. I see it, yeah. Okay, go on ahead. You’re going to want to go up to the third floor of the building using the elevator behind me, take an immediate left down the hall, and the office will be the second door on the right.”

Stephen thanked the secretary and peered back at the security guard, who had now been gazing off to the left, and walked to the elevator. As he pressed the call button, he rolled up his jacket sleeve and checked his smartwatch, which read 1:23. He exhaled with relief, knowing he was a few minutes early. He read somewhere that showing up a few minutes early, but not too early, was a good signal to potential employers.

Employment. Employment was the goal, no matter what else, Stephen thought to himself as he opened the door to the Short Stack Printing Company. Nothing was going to stop him from becoming employed, not even him.

“Well, Stephen, your resume seems to check out well enough,” Frank,

the interviewer, said. “We’ve also checked out your references; those came back good, too.”

Stephen was surprised that they had checked on his references. He was always told that employers rarely do, especially if it’s in the form of a written referral. The phrase “what an asshole” shot through his head and caught him off guard, so much so that he nearly thought he had muttered it out loud. He itched and then rubbed the inside of his ear in an effort to stop Doujin, who he knew was becoming agitated.

“I’m sorry I missed that, Frank, could you repeat the question?” Stephen said coyly. “I have, uhm, bad allergies.”

Stephen winced. It was the dead of winter; he knew that excuse wasn’t going to convince Frank.

“*I SAID*, why do you think that I should hire you, of all people? There are plenty of applicants, some with quite expansive portfolios.”

Stephen was sure that wasn’t the question Frank originally asked, and sure as hell not the tone in which he had asked it. If it were, it would have been enough to snap his attention back.

“Well, sir, you know, sir, I’ve just graduated college, and in those four years I was able to—”

“Can you believe this fucking guy?” Doujin said. “After all this, the rounds of phone interviews and emails back and forth, and he decides to act like this?”

Stephen began sweating; both of his ears began to itch worse than before. He knew there was nothing else to be done.

“St-Stop it,” Stephen muttered under his breath, but not quietly enough.

“What was that, son?” Frank said, with a disapproving look on his face.

“*All* that work, *all* those hours, toiling away at the computer. Just for this fat fucking slob to say there’re a million others like us out there. This guy couldn’t even begin to understand!”

Stephen felt an all-too-familiar feeling from his left ear. Pressure, and then a pop, like being inside of a helium balloon. Doujin was out, and continuing his rant, standing with what Stephen assumed to be his chest puffed at the mighty height of six-and-a-half inches.

“You should be ashamed of yourself, sir!” Doujin said while pointing at Frank.

Frank could not see him. In fact, Stephen was convinced that he was the only one that could see him, feel him, or hear Doujin. Yet, he knew Doujin was real; nothing as distracting or annoying as Doujin could possibly be a figment of his mind.

The other thing that Stephen knew was that this interview was over, and there was no way he’d be getting the job.

“You know,” Frank went on, “this is why I can’t stand your generation. All you do is want and want and want and expect things to just fall in your lap. Sure, you’ve got experience, the degree, but you haven’t wowed me. Tells me you ain’t gonna wow me on the job.”

All the while Doujin was jumping up and down on the man’s red head, swinging from the ends of his beard, and punching him in the chest with all the strength he could muster. When Doujin fell back onto the table, Stephen stood up and slammed his hand on the desk, squishing Doujin’s rubber-like body between his fingers.

“Sir, I’d just like to thank you for your time. I’ve decided that I’m no longer interested in the position,” Stephen said as he slapped Doujin back into his ear.

Having been abruptly cut off from his rant, Frank gave Stephen a confused look. Then, once his brain had processed the fact that Stephen had just smacked himself in the side of the head in front of him, his look turned to genuine concern. But before Frank could speak up to say something about it, Stephen was gone. Frank began to feel like he had been slapped in the face.

“We really showed that guy, huh?” Doujin said as Stephen pushed open the pane-glass door to the office building.

Stephen quickly put in his earbuds and swiped around on his phone for a second, just in case anyone was looking, trying his best to control his rage.

“What’s the one thing I asked you?”

“I know, I know, but that guy—”

“That GUY was my ticket to a better job, to a better life! I asked you to shut your greasy lips for 30 minutes and you couldn’t even do that.”

“Well, look, if it’s that important to you, why don’t we go back in an—”

“No! It’s too late for that, Doujin. If I go back in there now, I’ll look even more insane than before! You fucked me! You fucked up my life! I’ll be cursed working at the hoagie shop and doing freelance work for the rest of my life. That’s what you are, Doujin. You’re a curse.”

“I...I’m, not a curse.... I don’t even know what I am; you know that.” Doujin’s voice became solemnly drained. “Listen, Stevie, I’m sorry.”

“I don’t want your ‘sorry’ and I don’t want more of your existential crisis bullshit. This isn’t something we can just move past. You fucked my shit up, man.”

Doujin didn’t respond, and to both annoy him and block out anything

else he could say, Stephen blared music through his headphones. With nothing else to do and no reason to go home but to disappoint his mother, he walked for a while in the comfortable silence of music.

Stephen was pretty sure Doujin couldn't hear his thoughts, so he thought about it all without Doujin interrupting.

Mostly, Stephen thought about the Doujin, the little blue thing that was living in his head. He thought about what he had said. Could it be true? Could he really be cursed? Were curses even real? He then thought about how Doujin was likely living in his brain and that maybe that had something to do with it; maybe he had some sort of brain damage. He remembered early on in high school he had hit his head hard while playing football. But then why would Doujin have shown up a year later during his senior year of college like this? He then remembered his ex- from junior year of college; per her most recent Instagram posts, she had started calling herself a witch. That relationship had ended badly enough, he thought; maybe she cursed him.

Even more curious was the fact that Doujin wasn't anything like Stephen, so he couldn't possibly be some conjuration of his mind. Doujin said and thought things of other people that Stephen would never do. Doujin had even made him a better graphic designer, offering tips and suggestions on work that Stephen totally passed by.

But even more concerning to Stephen, regardless of brain damage or curse, was why the hell Doujin had a heavy New Jersey accent?

Stephen was teetering on the side of a curse when it suddenly began to rain, and by the look of the clouds, it would soon pour. As much as he wished to continue his walk, he wasn't dressed well enough to trudge through a torrential downpour.

He quickly ducked into the closest lunch spot that seemed in his price range, a made-to-order burger spot that cost much more than it was worth. Thankfully, Stephen wouldn't have to undergo too much human

contact, as a touch screen took your order, as opposed to a cashier. Though it had been an awful day so far, he decided to treat himself by getting the works: double patty, pepperjack cheese, sriracha mayo, jalapeños, onion straws, and pickles on a pretzel bun, with cheese and bacon fries and a large soda. Often, Stephen's eyes were bigger than his stomach, so he asked for it to go but would eat as much as he could while waiting for the rain to stop.

"What are we eating?" Doujin said suddenly.

"Burger."

"With what?"

"Whatever I wanted."

"Oh! Did you get those fried straws I like?"

"Yeah, but not because you like them."

Stephen could again feel the pressure building in his ear, and, not being able to do anything about it, he grunted in disapproval. His left earphone popped from his head as he felt Doujin escape from his ear and onto his shoulder.

"You seriously can't still be beat up about all of this are you?"

"*Still?* It was thirty minutes ago!"

"*Thirty minutes!* Stevie, you've been aimlessly walking around for three hours!"

Stephen stopped arguing with the small blue creature on his shoulder and instead turned to his phone. Surely enough, it read 4:45. He was sure he had only been walking around for a few minutes but, truthfully, hadn't been paying attention to his surroundings when walking.

“I’m not going to get over this, Doujin. You really messed that up for me; it was important.” Stephen pondered for a moment until something in his head clicked. “Wait a minute, how did you know what time it was?”

Doujin’s hand went into what looked to be his thigh but, upon a closer look, was a pocket. “I’ve got this!” Doujin said, holding out a small gold pocket watch.

“Wait a minute, you wear pants?”

“Of course I wear pants. Wouldn’t it be weird if I was walking around with my shit hanging out?”

“Steve!” The man at the counter called out.

“Hold on a sec.”

Stephen walked up to the front counter and received a big Styrofoam box and a clear plastic cup. He placed the box on the table and went to the soda machine. By the time he got back, the box was already opened, with Doujin chomping down on a single cheese fry.

“What the hell are these things? They’re great!”

“Cheese fries, and they’re expensive,” Stephen slapped Doujin from the fry. “How is it that you can eat, anyway?”

“I’m not really too sure, to be completely honest. I think I usually absorb the food that you eat or something, but I know I can taste!”

“So, you don’t know how you get nutrients, and you don’t know what you are, but you have pants and a pocket watch?”

Stephen picked up the burger, quickly inspected it to ensure what he ordered was there, and took an extra-large bite, nearly to the middle of

the burger. Doujin ran around under him picking up scraps of burger, sauce, and jalapeño.

“I’ve been thinkin’ a bit about what you said earlier,” Doujin said while chewing a small piece of hamburger meat. “You called me a curse. I don’t really know if that’s what I am, but I don’t really want to be. Listen, I’m really sorry about messing that up for you. I don’t know what happens to me. I know that I distract you; that guy just really pissed me off.”

“That guy pissed me off too, but that’s just not how you should handle that kind of thing. I’ve been dealing with guys like him my entire life. You don’t have to try and—do whatever it is you were trying to do—any time I’m slighted. I can stand up for myself.”

“That’s just the thing, I know you’re not going to!” The Doujin stopped focusing so much on the food and was now looking Stephen in the eyes. “I’ve been with you for a little less than a year, and we’ve done what? Three or four interviews? This is the only one that I’ve personally messed up. Not everything is my fault. You’re spineless. You let these people walk all over you because you yourself can’t put a little air in your chest, a little smoke up their ass!”

“Smoke up their ass? Air in my chest? Spineless? You’re one to talk; you can’t even interact with the world around you! You live inside my head for free and you’re allowed to do anything you want without consequence!”

“All’s I’m saying is this: you’re an incredible artist and graphic designer. You and I both know it. The only difference is you’re afraid to say it, to flaunt it, to show any kind of pride about it.”

Stephen didn’t know what to say. He had been bested. Doujin was right. Somehow, Doujin knew more about him than he knew about himself. He was timid, uncaring, and half-baked when it came to his work. A lot of the stuff he had submitted was stuff he cooked up in a hurry to try to

meet requirements and a deadline. His best work always comprised things he did on a whim, the stuff that took small amounts of time over days and weeks, but in which he never saw any worth. Stephen felt sad that he had only now come to find his professional worth and upset that Doujin hadn't told him sooner. Stephen was just about to say something insulting to Doujin when he was interrupted by a third voice.

"Hey," the tall, bearded man said, looming over his table, "you really oughta not drink caffeine," he pointed at the cup from which Stephen was sipping. "It makes them a bit hyper," he pointed directly at Doujin. There was no mistake in his aim.

"You can *hear* him!?"

"You can hear *me*?"

Ibaril and the Vivid

Mandrés Garrido

Red, purple, blue, red, purple, blue. There used to be four of us. But now it's just me. Black. My finger swirls on the desk that smells like apples. Everything smells like apples here. We used to enjoy that scent, the familiarity it brought. Now the smell has gone rotten in my nose. But soon, maybe I can experience something new.

A single loud clap startles me to attention.

“Ibaril, head straight. Chin up.”

The source of the clap stomps to me, her heels echoing as they meet the ground. She places her large hand to my chin and does the lifting for me. I can feel the length of her nail against my throat, a constant reminder of what she's capable of. She stares into my eyes, and I resist the urge to look away, knowing the consequences if I would. Her eyes were black like mine, and her hair was black like mine, too, but everything else was unlike me. Her eyes are coal to my onyx. Her hair was pulled taut to the ground, while mine leisurely strolled downward. She was much older than I was. Though none of us were sure by how much. She was here when we arrived; in fact, she was the only person here. She told us what to do and took care of us. That is, if we obeyed. We soon learned we had no option but to do just that.

She turned back to her board, but not before glancing at the three empty desks in the room. For a second, I wondered if she missed them, but I knew that wasn't possible. Someone like her doesn't feel the way we do. At least, that's what we decided.



I was eager to leave the lessons for that day, but I made sure she didn't know. I left the lesson room and headed to the dining table. The same routine she set for us. I flattened my skirt as I sat down, still surprised at the quiet of the room that was once filled with life. I counted the five minutes it took before she brought me a single apple. She used to watch us eat, but after a while she would leave as quickly as she came. I was

grateful for her absence, otherwise what I set out to do would not be possible.



“It’s dead.”

“She’s going to get mad at us! Reance, you killed it! This was your idea!”

“She won’t find out. We’ll just make another one.”

I listened to the three argue over what was once a very much alive rabbit. His white fur was now black. His once red eyes now glossed white. Reance came up with the experiment to feed slices of apple to Mr. Rabbit. Urale was hesitant about the idea, nervously hiding her short hair behind her ears, but I could tell she was curious about what might happen. Lua was, once again, cleaning their mess. None of them asked me about what I thought. I was always on the outside of their circle, looking in. I wondered why. We all arrived at the same time. We were together in the routine she had laid out for us. Was it because I looked like her? I wished they would see how different I am. But I never shared that with them.



Even so, I thought, I’m happy to have been witness to you three. For Reance’s idea, Urale’s perfect amount of hesitance to push Reance even further, and Lua for sharing what that experiment meant. Her apples were poison.

I summoned a rabbit from the rabbit room and fed him the apple. He happily ate the fruit, and I gave him a guilty pet behind his ears.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Rabbit. You will have to die every day—for a bit.”

I thought about how silly it was to apologize to him, as this was just a

creation of Lua's. The real Mr. Rabbit died that day. Even so, Lua was able to conjure up this perfect imposter, a being whose life will reset every day. For now, he was real enough—real enough to easily dispose of the apple she fed me every day.



Ten lessons have passed since I started my plan. Thirty lessons have passed since the others left. Abstaining from the fruit, I can see what they saw. Something more than the black and white of our world. So many different colors. I see the ones that remind me of them. And I see others. This is what was missing. She wanted us to create something in her vision, but her vision didn't have this. She didn't *feel* this. No more apples rent from her flesh, filled with the poison of her knowledge. What she fed us was enough to know how to create a world, but what she tried to hide is how to create a *better* one.

Her heels echoed as they met the floor, and in her hand was an apple. She placed it in the center of the dining room table.

"I will not eat."

That sentence was enough to throw her into a rage. She slammed her hands onto the table.

"What is this *disobedience*?" She seethed, "Ibaril, you wish to be like *them*? You shall not; you will eat this apple!"

I stood from the table with haste and ran to the window—my escape. Then, I felt a burning sensation across my back, and I fell to the floor. She towered over me, her nails dyed with yellow.

"*What is this?*" Her white skin looked even more pale at the sight of the bloodied nails. The blood dripped from her nails to the ground with a thud, as every drop quickly turned into bright, vibrant yellow apples.

“Apples from your own flesh? Your own knowledge? Do you think you know better than I?”

“I don’t!” I screamed back, “I don’t think I know better than you....”

It wasn’t doubt I was feeling, but realization. On my own, I didn’t know better. But if I was with them,....

“Together, we will create a world much better than you ever could! We will be better than you, Eden! I will find them!”

I wasn’t expecting the response I got from her—a sudden sharp scream, a sound I had never heard her make. Mr. Rabbit had bitten Eden’s ankles, his white fur being stained with the black ichor of her blood. I got up to my feet, reached for the window, and leaped. Leaped into a world of my own creation.

*Paid in Life

Daniel W. Larlham Jr.

The 1996 Cadillac Deville screeched to a halt halfway down Lighthouse Way. The car was rusted, loud, and smoking from both ends. The tread on the tires was stripped bald, the right turning blinker was cracked and broken, and the entire left side had been keyed to hell. It was a sad and sorry sight of a vehicle. Many would describe it as a shell of its factory form, but to Patrick Finny, it was pride and joy. Finny, which his friends tended to call him, finished off the last of his joint and tossed it out of the car window. He locked the car but kept all the windows down, figuring that on a hot day like this nobody would bother, especially in this neighborhood. Walking across Lighthouse Way, Finny stomped out the joint, which was still smoldering on the pavement. In front of him was one of the most elegant beach houses he had seen in his life.

On stilts, the home had to be at least four stories tall. The glass pane windows covering the front of the A-shaped house reflected light in all directions, as if it were a Christmas ornament. Finny walked up from the ground floor to the second-story deck where the front door was. Finny chimed the bell and could hear it methodically echo throughout the large open entryway on the other side. From the small window in the front door, Finny could see that no lights were on in the parts of the house he could see. He checked his watch, noting that it was half-past noon. He had hoped someone was awake. He turned around to the rail of the deck that helped to ensure no unfortunate accidents take place. To the right, a little bit down Lighthouse Way, Finny saw his car. From this distance he couldn't understand how anyone would call his Cadillac a disaster waiting to happen. On the horizon in front of him, he could see more beach houses on stilts, a golf course, a clubhouse, and a dock. To the left was the ocean, which looked small and insignificant from where he was standing.

Finny rang the doorbell again and listened to it hum throughout the house. Finny checked his watch again; it was ten minutes after the last time he checked. This time he could hear someone walking around the house with heaving feet.

"Hello?" Finny called out.

He could hear some grumbling from the inside. A shadowy figure appeared in the entryway and was moving closer to the door. The lock clicked and the door swung open. In front of Finny was a middle-aged man with jet-black hair, who stood confidently, even though Finny, who was clearly hunching over, towered over his small frame.

“What do you want, boy?” the man said, “and you better not be sellin’ no religion, I ain’t need a new god.”

“No religion, sir. I—I wouldn’t even think of it. You’re Fred Ditmar, I take it? The owner of this beautiful house?”

“Mr. Ditmar is just fine. And yes, I am; what of it?”

“Mr. Ditmar, I’m a salesman from the Borough Corporation. We design and install radiation-proof nuclear bunkers for those that wish to live on past the inevitable nuclear war. What I’m here to sell is your future.”

“Nuclear war?” Mr. Ditmar said, “The Ruskies are finished. They’re on our side now, where have you been for the last decade? All of our enemies are too busy blowing each other up to worry about us.”

“Sure, sure, the Russians are finished. But what about the Chinese? The Koreans? Iran? Have you even thought about what could happen if Cuba developed its own nuclear weapon? The threat of communist-synthesized hell has only retreated into the shadows, my friend; it hasn’t been eradicated yet.”

For an initial deposit of \$350k, nearly \$150k more than the cost of the home and property, Mr. Ditmar commissioned the Borough Corporation to begin to plan and construct a nuclear bunker underneath the stilted home. The 700-square-foot bunker was to include enough food to feed a family of six for ten years. Mr. Ditmar’s wife thought the idea was absolutely ridiculous. However, the more and more Mr. Ditmar thought about it, the more and more he realized that he really would like for him and his family to live past the end of the world.

During the nine months that the bunker would be under construction, the booming economy took a turn for the worst. Borough Corp. made millions as people, no longer afraid of the nuclear holocaust, began to fear societal collapse, based on tremors that bled through to popular culture and news following the economic collapse. Television shows, documentaries, and pundits began to explore the idea that nuclear war isn't the worst thing that could happen to American hegemony. Borough Corp. changed their marketing campaign from nuclear bunkers to survivalist bunkers; largely, there was no difference between the two.

Finny, as an extension, did well, too. The turnaround on nuclear bunkers in his particular selling area had erupted. The suburbs of coastal Virginia had feared the case in which city dwellers from the north and the south would begin to raid neighborhoods and towns of their canned foods and water supplies. Many people wanted extra food storage pockets, running water, generators, gun racks, and a near-infinite number of other add-ons. Finny was accommodating to this, as long as he believed the person could pay for it all. Finny made millions of dollars for the Borough Corp. in the nine short months since the economic collapse, as people emptied their savings and 401Ks, anticipating a future that had no use of money.

For his good work, Finny was awarded a raise, and a hefty one at that. He traded in his old 1996 Cadillac for a brand-new Deville, which he loved even more than the last. Along with his raise, he was able to move out from his parents' house and into a relatively spacious studio apartment. Truthfully, Finny liked being in the car more than he liked being in the apartment, which is why he was glad his job required a bit of driving. Along with his raise, Finny was slated for a promotion, but he had to complete the Ditmar job before it would become official.

Finny parked his jet-black Cadillac in the same spot on Lighthouse Way on which he had parked when he first knocked on Ditmar's door. There were still craftsmen there making a few final adjustments to the bunker and an engineer ensuring they had been made correctly. Ditmar was sitting in a lawn chair on the second-story deck, smoking a half-lit cigar and reading the newspaper.

“Hail!” said Finny, with no response from Mr. Ditmar. “Mr. Ditmar!”

“Finny!” he said, picking up his cigar, dusting it off, and popping it back in his mouth. “How are ya?”

Finny worked his way up the stairs to the deck. They then exchanged pleasantries inside the behemoth of a kitchen, as Ditmar poured finny an awful cup of coffee. Finny briefly thought that, for a man of money, Ditmar sure didn’t shell out for coffee beans. The cup of mud sloshed when he picked it from the table, burnt him at the sip, and left grounds on his lip.

“Well, Mr. Ditmar,” he said, “I’ll hope you’ll be excited to know that today will be my final visit, as the project will be wrapping up later this afternoon.”

“Ah, so you’ll finally be out of my hair,” Ditmar said, and then chuckled quietly.

Finny took Mr. Ditmar to the ground level of his property to officially unveil and show off Ditmar’s brand new, state-of-the-art, nuclear-safety facility. At first glance, the bunker looked like little more than a large boulder purposefully placed on the property. Many people in the neighborhood had large rocks on their property, often times as a unique place to sit and sunbathe in the summer heat. Upon closer inspection, the rock-looking hump had a door. Finny knocked three times on the door and moments later the engineer opened the door from the inside and greeted the two.

Finny explained that the door locks from the inside and can only be unlocked with a key, which the engineer promptly handed over to Ditmar. Finny then explained that the inside-locking mechanism needed a code to be reprogrammed, a code for which Ditmar himself would be solely responsible. Finny and the engineer turned their backs as Ditmar reprogrammed the keypad. The three walked the impressive bunker’s hardwood floors and metal hallways, through the three

bedrooms designed to fit six people, the kitchen, and storage room stocked full enough of dehydrated goods to feed six people for ten years. Through the kitchen was the hydroponic room where vegetable plants had already been growing. Seed and soil had been stocked under the planters for the circumstance in which any of the plants die. Past the hydroponics room to the left was the waste-recycling room, where liquids were turned into drinkable water and solids were turned into fertilizer. To the right of the hydroponics room was the clean air-ventilation room and the world's most efficient battery-powered generator. Back through the kitchen to the left was the living room, complete with two leather couches, a television, a DVD player, the latest game system, and a quite impressive collection of shows, movies, and games.

On their way out, Finny reminded Ditmar that payment completion, roughly half of the bill, was still due and handed him a bill. Ditmar assured him that he would send a check in the mail the next day, as his wife, who wouldn't be home until much later, had taken his checkbook. Finny, not happy that he would be leaving empty-handed, decided that he would be even more unhappy if he had to bear another cup of Ditmar's coffee.

Three weeks later, a check for the final installment still had not been received by Borough Corp. Finny was sent all the way back out to the house to harass Ditmar about the payment, or at least receive a formal apology that it had just slipped Ditmar's mind in his aging state. Finny in fact was looking for some form of excuse as to why the check hadn't been received, as his management had not been happy about it, and any excuse would do, so long as it didn't make him look bad. Finny sweated at the idea of coming back to his boss empty-handed.

To Finny's shock, Ditmar hadn't been in the home for some time. Ditmar's wife explained to Finny that she hadn't seen her husband in over a month. Four weeks ago, she left the home to visit family across the country. When she returned, he hadn't been home and he didn't even leave a note. His car was gone, too.

“It’s not all that uncommon for Fred,” she said, “but the car’s gone, so I know he’s okay. He loves that car more than anything. He’s probably gone on some hunting expedition again.”

Finny left empty-handed and defeated in spirit. He dreaded having to go back to his boss and explain that he had no idea when or if that check would be coming. He thought of Ditmar kindly, but he had also never been ripped off before. He felt like a vulnerable fool, like a child that had been robbed of his binky.

Months later, it was finally agreed upon that Fred Ditmar had either died or had been holed up in the bunker, attempting to escape his payment. His car was fished out of Chincoteague, with the keys and nothing else, scrubbed clean of even the mere idea that Ditmar had once driven it, other than the license plate that claimed he owned it. If he had been murdered, then why wouldn’t they have taken the car? And why would they have taken the registration and insurance cards from the car? If he was in the bunker, how would he have driven his car into the bay? Surely there are easier ways to fake a death. If he was in the bunker, then why wasn’t the generator running? These questions were asked during a court battle between Ditmar’s wife and Borough Corp. The judge found that since they could not prove Ditmar was in the bunker, they were not allowed to exhume the bunker and that Ditmar’s wife could not be held responsible for any payment Ditmar owed to Borough Corp., as there was no definite proof that he had died.

No one knew who exactly volleyed the first nuclear missile, or even why. It all happened much too quickly. The sky lit up in glorious hellfire. Entire population centers had been decimated in fractions of a second. If there had been anyone there to record it, they most surely would have written something like: “What we are witnessing is the most efficient rate of human misery and death in the history of the world. Surely, the peak of human achievement.”

Those who weren’t immediately erased from existence slowly died out over the days, weeks, months, and years after the event; with that, the

memories of the former began to die at a faster and faster rate.

Seven-and-a-half years after the bombs went off, the door of Ditmar's nuclear bunker decompressed and opened. The light blinded Ditmar, the first time he had seen the sun in nearly a decade. It was much brighter than he remembered. Ditmar, who felt and looked much older than he did before, crept out from the industrial cave with creaking bones and joints. Where his home used to be was now completely flat. In fact, the entire neighborhood had been completely wiped away; trees, homes, vehicles, and animals had all been erased.

"Where are my friends?" Ditmar asked himself aloud, "Where is my family? Am I the only one that survived? No... It cannot be... It can't."

Ditmar turned to look for some sort of sign of civilization, some kind of home. Instead, he found the most beautiful scene he had ever seen in all his years of living and traveling. From where he stood, he could see across the bay, to the island across the bay. Everything had been completely flattened. He could see the humps of the island as the sun sat plump on top of them. He swore that across the bay on top of that hill he could see a fully grown stallion sprinting at full speed across the horizon.

Ditmar fell to his knees, and after a few quick but beautiful moments, his body fell to the ground face first.

Butterfly Flowers

Photograph by Anna Keating



A Flower That Never Bloomed

Austin Post

It's our anniversary. I've been in jail for sixteen years now. I've now been imprisoned for as long as I have been married to him. I'm fifty, and I've never lived. Sucks.

This did not have to happen: the tragedy, the tears, the pain, the death. The silence. This did not have to happen. And maybe it's my fault. Maybe it's his.

I walked on eggshells for all those years. They cut into my feet. The blood tracked all over my house, all over my life. Until all I saw was red—in the sky that was once blue, in the young daisies that bloomed in my garden, in the wedding ring wrapped around my finger. Red. All bloody red.

Sometimes I'm happy I did it. Sometimes I regret it. It ebbs and flows like the tide, like the weather. Ever-changing. Violent one day, peaceful the next. Just like him. Just like him.

He made me into his own personal servant, fixed-up all pretty in makeup covering bruises and sunken eyes. I was his ever-glowing jewel, never needy, always ready to serve and shine a light on him. But that jewel he polished all pretty got dull. And the pieces of me he wore away never grew back. That eighteen-year-old who married John isn't me anymore. She's gone, washed away after years of braving his storm. He fixed me up, but after a while, I couldn't shine for him anymore. I just couldn't.

He backed me into a corner, his eyes burning red, his hands twisting around that golf club. And I shot him. The bullet ripped right through his hollow chest. The stain of his dead body is probably still on the carpet. I'm not there to clean up his final mess.

You know he proposed on my birthday, making my day his own. It was after this hysterical fight we had. The first time he had ever hit me so hard, you could tell the next morning. I covered up the black eye for the engagement photos.

He whispered, “Will you marry me, Rose?” in the same tone he had muttered, “I’ll kill you, Rose,” the night before.

All the social workers and prosecutors and defenders and the judge and everyone in my goddamned life asked me why I didn’t leave. I know I was just a kid, but I still wonder too. I know it wasn’t that easy. I was already his; I was already someone else. I looked in the mirror, and my eyes were not my own. They were beady and tired and meek. I looked forever like a deer caught in headlights, his car always threatening to run me over.

And I knew he was never going to let me go. Never. I was his, then and forever, until that bullet freed me. Freed me for about an hour before I was arrested.

An hour in 50 years.

I sit here, the sun shining in through the one tiny window in my cell, and I feel like I’m suffocating as the memories flood back into my mind. The walls are pushing into me. I was trapped in my marriage, and now I’m just as trapped. Never free. What did I ever do to be tossed from one house of abuse to another to another to another? Locked in chains and fear my whole life, the calluses on my wrists and ankles continuing to blister and ache.

They say hindsight’s 20/20, but my vision’s still blurry. I don’t know if I made the right decision. I think John would’ve killed me if I hadn’t gotten to him first. And maybe that would’ve been better. Maybe death is better than sitting behind bars with a life sentence, just a living corpse, rotting away with glassed-over eyes and a confused conscience.

But for now, I’m trapped here.

Life isn’t red anymore; it’s more of a gray. And a metallic smell still hangs in the air, but it’s the bars, not blood.

Four Little Chickens, Three Little Chickens

Joseph Nicholas Luongo

Daddy always told me I should leave people alone and learn to mind my own business, and I generally tried. Generally. It was tricky though. During the spring and early summer, when the tulips began peeking their dainty heads above the ground, everybody and their cousin's nephew's twice-removed niece's sister would gather amongst the blooming scent of honeysuckle bushes before the blistering humid weather started to give them the vapors. It was a charming, fragrant, and a frequently sopping wet time of year when all of the most fascinating conversations took place. I always wondered what the women were talking about, being such a peculiar coterie of voices darting back and forth. I walked past them slowly whenever we crossed paths, trying to hear what the women were talking about. Sometimes I listened just to listen; other times I did so to learn how to interact successfully with such people. It wasn't that I couldn't interact with those people, it was more that I wanted to learn how to blend in amongst them. The ladies, and sometimes girls more adjacent to my age, discreetly whispered about some man or woman they thought of as attractive, the latest fashion trends, and the loudness of the of Stanley couple's latest disagreements. The Stanleys had a knack for becoming the subject of a conversation, regardless of how it started. It didn't matter if they were commenting on the lovely scent of a flower, someone's lovely baking, or the temperature that day. The Stanleys' bickering just ended up being the natural conclusion to any given topic.

The men, on the other hand, were seldom adept in their ability to hold competent conversation, often stringing together fancy business words that didn't make a lick of sense but sounded important. Sometimes they'd talk about what woman they'd like to be with, but never could be in a million of these sweltering summers, as well as the women they were with, or how things were in the good old days. Sometimes those talks about the good old days would venture into the subject of their daddy or their cousin's stepfather Cletus owning someone a shade or two darker than they. These conversations were generally the dull ones,

usually just some variation on a theme they mimicked to look bigger than everyone else. It always seemed a little sad to me that the men were trying so hard to make themselves look good in other people's eyes. They must have been so tired with all that trying.

It was one Sunday after church when I heard something a mile less dull than the conversations I was used to hearing. When the weather did get warm enough to give people the vapors and the fruit-bearing trees started to ripen, I decided to take a quieter way home for a change. It was different from the usual route that gave me the colorful tidbits of hearsay emitted by the churchgoing throngs, which made it a rarely traveled path for me. I don't know why I took it over the usual route home; I just didn't quite feel like taking the normal way that day. Out amongst the peach trees and dirt paths, the crunch of the dirt beneath my feet had a rhythm to it, as I slowly ran, unbothered, down the road. It was a sort of spell that lulled me into a sort of detachment from the act itself. The outside quiet allowed my mind to wander as I worked my way home. Not having much else to do for the run home, I looked up at the tall billowing clouds in the sky. Those "pillows for the angels," as mama often called them, were present just enough to give a person breaks from that bonfire in the sky without threatening rain. Eventually, not far off from home, I approached the neighbor's house, and I heard an almighty hollering I could not avoid.

I slowed to a walk and kept my eyes forward as I tried to hear what was going on. It was in the old Stanley house. The original Mr. Stanley, according to local legend, used to own a plantation some miles away. He had a hundred slaves, a number I doubted as it seemed too general a number. I would have believed 97 or 103, but exactly a hundred? Regardless, the original Mr. Stanley once had a plantation with a hundred slaves. Then the war with the North came. Men and boys from this town went off to die, so rich men and boys could own some other men and boys. The original Mr. Stanley's side lost and he couldn't own people anymore. He lost all his money and died poor. The family had to sell the house and the land, and eventually the Stanley clan ended up in this little old house close to where my family lives. The Stanleys weren't

too far off from us, just far enough for some healthy boundaries and an oak tree older than the Stanley bloodline. The oak tree had a tire swing hanging from one of the stronger branches. Strange how things worked out like that for the Stanleys. Daddy's family never owned people, and we never went from riches to rags. My family had owned their house and the dirt under it as long as anyone could remember. Still, that exodus from the land of cotton to the land of mud happened long ago. The new Mr. Stanley was presently in the midst of some kind of hollering match with Mrs. Stanley, and she was winning again. I couldn't make all of it out, only bits and pieces. I heard something about Mr. Stanley "loving those damn chickens" more than he loved Mrs. Stanley. Not being completely stupid, Mr. Stanley likely denied the accusation.

"That is absolutely ridiculous. I love you more than those chickens," Mr. Stanley softly pleaded.

Thing was, his wife wasn't exactly incorrect about those "damn chickens." In what they called a back yard, Mr. Stanley had four chickens. He fed the chickens better than he fed himself or his wife, made sure they were clean and safe, and made the odd point to give them birthdays where they'd get extra feed.

"Oh, is that so? More than anything, you say?" Mrs. Stanley demanded, knowing full well the results.

"Yes, and you know it," Mr. Stanley retorted.

"Ok, then. When is my birthday?" Mrs. Stanley challenged.

Mr. Stanley could not, for the life of him or his marriage, remember what his wife's birthday was. It was July 16th. To be fair, the only reason I knew was because mama knew, and she insisted on me bringing a pecan pie over every year. The Stanleys continued their hollering match with each other, and eventually I put enough distance between me and their house to the point that the yelling slowly turned into aggressive

mumbling. Don't misunderstand me, I love overhearing things. Still, ears need a break now and then, like any other part of the body.

After the contest over which of the Stanleys could shout the loudest, things quieted down and there wasn't much worth pretending not to listen to. I played with the rest of the children nearby who were my age, went to school and got taught that the North was filled with godless heathens living in sin, and went to Church on Sundays and got told I was a godless heathen. Kind of makes it hard to hate the folk up north when we got so much in common, with us all living in sin and such. The heat was sizzling to the point that every lady in church had their fans out trying not to faint. Can't punish a man with hellfire when that's the weather Monday through Sunday until fall comes around. Still, the bright-colored dresses made the congregation look like flowers neatly contained in their pew flowerbeds. It made sense in a way, considering most of the ladies were named Dahlia, Rose, Camellia, or Heather. I couldn't help but glance around and soon noticed that the Stanleys were amongst the congregation. They stood next to each other and sang their hymns, but they seemed so cool to each other in this bonfire weather. When the preacher finished his hour-and-a-half speech on how we were all going to Hell, we all went home instead. People peeled off to their roads and their houses, until eventually it was just me, mama, daddy, and the Stanleys lurking in the background. They were bickering about the chickens again. One of the chickens had a birthday coming up. I'm pretty sure it was Gloria's, one of the hens. Mrs. Stanley went on about how Mr. Stanley didn't pay attention to her, and how he liked the chickens more than her. Mr. Stanley went on about how she was crazy for being jealous of poultry, of all things, a rather grievous mistake on his part.

Mr. Stanley, in a moment of staggering shortsightedness, said, "You're acting crazy, woman, absolutely positively crazy."

"Oh," Mrs. Stanley replied in a voice that could freeze Hell, "You think I'm crazy, do you?"

The word “crazy” in particular was the thing that sent Mrs. Stanley into a fit that would have made Gettysburg look like a friendly mud wrestling match. Mama, daddy, and I all did our best to put some distance between us and the cussing that came out of Mrs. Stanley’s mouth. She always tended to put the same amount of salt in her language that she put into her cooking, but this time she used the whole dang shaker on poor Mr. Stanley. Mama and daddy generally took to minding their own business, but it took them biting down on their knuckles to not giggle at poor Mr. Stanley being salted like a side of beef. It was a show to behold, watching Mrs. Stanley’s eyes widen and her ribcage billow out like the clouds as she prepared to unleash a volley of reasons for Mr. Stanley to reconsider his future choice in adjectives.

Some time passed, and the arguing kept going. It was kind of hard to miss, considering our windows were open often during this time of year. I didn’t know what was going to end first, this heat or the showdown between the Stanleys over the chickens. Wherever I went with mama and daddy, the almighty thunder of Mrs. Stanley’s anger towards her husband’s chicken nursery seemed to follow. For a lady who truly seemed to loathe those chickens with an absolute passion, she seemed to talk about them quite a lot. After a quiet supper one night, thanks to a rare lull in the Stanley’s perpetual bickering, I had a moment to myself. I could faintly hear their grumblings, and grumblings usually turned to shouting with the Stanleys. I danced along the floorboards, making sure not to let them creak beyond the usual sounds the house made every day. I quietly turned the doorknob, moving it so slowly I could hear the spring inside creak a little. Out the door I went, closing the door behind me, and crept up to the Stanley’s house. It had been a minute since I got this close to a good conversation, and I wasn’t about to let the opportunity slip.

It seemed the marital situation between the two Stanleys had devolved rather substantially since our families had last parted. This assumption was predicated on the previous assumption the Stanleys still had a marital situation to begin with. Perhaps it was because Gloria the hen’s

birthday was tomorrow. Mr. Stanley's gift to the chicken was repainting her special nook in the chicken coop. The problem was that the Stanley's house needed repainting, and it was this lack of priorities that caused yet another increase in friction between the two Stanleys. As usual, the arguing grew to something fierce, as Mrs. Stanley explained to her husband what he could do with those chickens in details that would make the Devil blush. It was then that Mrs. Stanley did something she didn't do particularly often.

Mrs. Stanley stormed out to the back yard with a shotgun, with her husband close trying to reason with her. She aimed the shotgun at Gloria, but the chicken knew what was going on. The hen clucked and flapped its wings and ran all over their back yard as Mrs. Stanley tried to line up a shot while Mr. Stanley failed to get her to see reason. Eventually, she got the shot she wanted and blasted that chicken's soul into the next state. I was far enough away and behind the old oak swinging tree that my ears didn't ring much, but I did get chicken guts all over my shoes which stuck out ever so slightly from the tree. I quietly thanked the Lord that the Stanleys were too busy with each other to notice me. Only trouble I got out of the situation besides chicken guts was a little ping in my ears for a few minutes. Thank God, that oak tree was there; otherwise I wouldn't have been able to hear any more conversations, and everyone would sound like Mickey Mouse. Mrs. Stanley and her husband, on the other hand, were incredibly deaf now. Still in a fury, Mrs. Stanley marched over to Gloria, the now-very dead chicken, and grabbed the object of her perpetual ire by the ankles. As mama and daddy rushed out of the house to me to make sure I was alive, they couldn't help but freeze in their tracks and just blink. They just looked at the situation unfolding before them. Before long, some of the other neighbors were outside and looking at the commotion. Mrs. Stanley had what was left of Gloria by the ankles, and was proceeding to beat Mr. Stanley over the head with the chicken's dripping lower torso. She then told her husband exactly what was going to be for dinner, and chucked the emptied shotgun at him before storming inside. I carefully picked the chicken guts and errant feather off of my shoes, and daddy walked me and mama home.

As the vapor-inducing weather wore out its welcome and colder winds blew in, things seemed to remain quiet at the Stanley residence. No one saw either of them for a few weeks, and rumors began to swirl. Rumors were the best kind of business I wasn't supposed to stick my nose in, but I always managed to with reckless abandon. The running theory was that Mrs. Stanley killed her husband and was sleeping next to the body all day. Another theory was that she used witchcraft to turn her husband into a chicken since he liked them so much. At last, sometime at the very beginnings of the new spring, both Stanleys emerged. Under the springtime sun, before the weather produced a heat that would give everyone the vapors again, the Stanleys announced they were expecting their first child soon. If it ended up being a girl, I wondered if Mrs. Stanley would take offense at the child being named Gloria. I admit, it was rather confusing for people who seemed to dislike each other so fiercely to have a baby.

I looked to mama and daddy and asked, "Why'd they have a baby together if they hate each other so much?"

Daddy chuckled, looked at me and said, "They don't hate each other necessarily. It's just that the Stanleys didn't know how to express themselves to each other. Mr. Stanley didn't know how to make Mrs. Stanley feel loved in the way she wanted, and she didn't know how to communicate that to him."

I spent a second thinking over what daddy said.

"So they were always yelling at each other because they didn't know how to talk to each other?" I asked.

"That's how people are sometimes," mama filled in. "People get so wrapped up in their own heads and thoughts that they can't put themselves in the other person's shoes for a minute. When people do manage to come together and see each other's side, they can end up creating something bigger and better than themselves."

As time passed onward, a gentle breeze passed through, bringing the scent of early blooms. Where there was once the seemingly eternal fury of the Stanleys, now resided the gentle cooing of their baby and the gentle chirping of birds in the trees. I'll admit, listening to the Stanleys arguing was an overflowing chalice of amusement, but it was nice hearing the trees talk with their rustling leaves now that there was some peace and quiet.

Contributors' Notes

Nana Ohemaa Asante is a graduate student pursuing a Master in Public Health degree in the Health Policy and Management Track. She received an Honors English with Distinction degree in May 2021. She enjoys all forms of creative writing and public speaking. Nana Ohemaa hopes to obtain her medical degree after finishing her master's.

Sophia Johnson is a sophomore Environmental Studies major from Maryland. She doesn't write much anymore but has always admired writing and loves to express her creativity in other ways. She has previously written for *The Review* as a reporter and is also involved with other arts organizations, including the Harrington Theatre Arts Company.

Anna Keating is a junior Political Science major with a concentration in Law, Politics and Theory. She has minors in Public Policy, Environmental Humanities, and Gender Studies. She loves yoga, hiking and photography. She especially enjoys photographing nature and hopes to have a career in environmental law or policy.

Dominique Kendus graduated in December with an English major and Legal Studies minor. In her free time, she enjoys writing and playing video games. Dominique plans to attend law school this fall.

Daniel Larlham Jr. is a senior at the University of Delaware majoring in English and Communications. He enjoys the outdoors, as long as it's not too cold out.

Joseph Nicholas Luongo is a senior English major with a minor in Educational Technology at the University of Delaware. He enjoys creative writing in all its forms and looks forward to turning his passion for literature into a career when he graduates.

Ollie Miller is a senior English major from Delaware. They love music, poetry, and books of all kinds. They plan to pursue an MFA after graduation.

Emily Principe is a junior English major from New Castle, Del. She loves storytelling through writing and enjoys reading, as well as listening to and performing music. After graduation, she plans to become a television producer or scriptwriter.

Austin Post is a freshman English major from Warwick, N.Y. In her free time, she enjoys playing guitar, watching movies, and reading. She also enjoys travel and photography. After graduation, she hopes to get an MFA in creative writing.

Ankita Prasad is a senior Neuroscience major and Violin Performance minor from Newark, Del. She has always loved both music and writing and enjoys expressing herself through these forms of art. After graduation, Ankita will take a gap year and is excited to travel and discover more about herself during this time. She hopes to attend medical school in the near future.

Kate Reim is a junior Elementary Education major with a minor and concentration in English. She is passionate about long-distance running, reality TV, and growing deeper in her faith. Her ultimate academic goal is to publish a memoir and maintain a career in teaching.

Prabhsimar Singh is a freshman with a business undecided major. He likes to draw using the manga/anime art style. He creates webcomics and will continue to create them after graduation.

Hannah Slesinski is a sophomore Wildlife Ecology and Conservation major from West Deptford, N.J. She loves nature and being outdoors. She has had a soft spot for wildlife since she was a child. She plans to go to graduate school to become a wildlife biologist after graduation.

Annika Stein is an English Education major from Kassel, Germany. She loves ice baths in the creek, expressing herself through dance and writing, and likes to feel the wind blowing through her hair.

Editors' Notes

Molly Ferguson is a senior English major and Theatre Studies minor from Middletown, Delaware. When she isn't editing, she enjoys writing, reading science fiction, and ice skating. She plans to pursue a career in book publishing after graduation.

Sathiya Kannan is an undeclared freshman from just outside Washington, D.C. Besides reading and writing, she loves spending her time outdoors by hiking, kayaking, ice skating, and more. Although she has yet to decide on a field, she knows she wants to give back to the community, whether through beneficial legislation, wildlife research, or entrepreneurial ventures.

Alexis Kennedy is a junior English major from Newark, Delaware. She loves creating new worlds to explore in her writing and hopes to continue creating after graduation. Her first play was performed by the E-52 Theatre Club in fall 2021.

Stephanie Maria is a junior English major from Hightstown, New Jersey. She enjoys reading, writing, and collecting plants. After college, she hopes to travel abroad as a freelancer.

Noah Martin is a sophomore English major from Frankford, Delaware. He enjoys reading and going to the drive-on beach and hopes to work in print-media news after graduation.

Gabriela (Gaby) Nieves is a freshman English major from Newark, Delaware. She lives for stories and the various forms they take—from TV shows and movies, to songs and novels! Typically found with an iced coffee in hand, Gaby loves filling her free time with fiction. She plans on pursuing an editorial career in the publishing industry after graduation.

Cadence Roy is a freshman Communications major from South Jersey. She is an avid reader and writer of poetry who also enjoys running, playing the piano, and collecting vinyls in her spare time. After

graduating from the University of Delaware, Cadence hopes to attend graduate school and work toward a career as an investigative journalist.

Isabella Shannon is a senior English major from Yonkers, New York. She has a passion for animals, writing, and listening to music. After graduation, she hopes to work in publishing.

Shozzett Silva is fellow human, life-long learner who wishes you well.

Production Notes

The text of *Caesura* features the font family Adobe Caslon Pro, based on the 1720s design of William Caslon in London and revived by Carol Twombly for Adobe in 1990 as Adobe Caslon.

The font Chalet Comprimé Cologne Sixty, one of ten varieties of the Chalet Comprimé family created by Delaware-based type foundry House Industries, was used for page titles and cover and title-page numerals.

The font Desdemona, an open face based on John F. Cumming's c. 1886 font Quaint and designed in 1992 by David Berlow for Font Bureau, was used for the cover and title page word "Caesura," the words that indicate section headings, and the caesura motif icon.

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