

CAE^{||}SURA

University of Delaware Literary Annual

40

2019 || 2020



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.

On the Cover

The cover photoillustration by Deshon & Associates GRAPHIC DESIGN includes art submissions from **Zihan Wu** ("Precious") and **Krista Webster** ("The Changeling").

CAESURA

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Acknowledgments

The opportunity for students to showcase their literary skills and talent would not have been possible without the stalwart support of **the Gregory family**. Even as the University cut back on many extracurricular opportunities for its students due to the pandemic, *Caesura* was able to continue, thanks to the generosity of these longtime friends of the department.

Caesura is made possible by a generous donation from the Gregory family. The staff of *Caesura* wish to remember **Arthur and Mary Jane Gregory** for their generosity in supporting this literary magazine and helping the literary arts at the University of Delaware to flourish. The late **Starke John Gregory** continued the tradition begun by his parents. We would also like to thank **Andrea Schoen-Gregory and Gary Schoen** and **Elizabeth Gregory** for their continuing support and dedication to creative writing at the University of Delaware.

Many thanks as well to **John Ernest**, Chair of the English Department, for his ongoing and enthusiastic support of creative writing, and to **Ann Marie Green** and **Kaylee Olney**, for their patience and administrative help with *Caesura*.

Editorial Staff

This 40th edition of *Caesura* has been produced under extraordinary conditions in time of a pandemic due to COVID-19. The University of Delaware moved to online classes in the spring of 2020, just as our undergraduate editors made the selections of creative work to include in the final manuscript for *Caesura*. Even during this upheaval, our editors, disrupted in their academic schedules, work schedules, and often their living arrangements, pulled together to create this edition. *Caesura* is founded on student writing and student editing. Without their dedication under these extreme usual circumstances, this issue would not have been possible.

The following students offered their efforts in the fall of 2019 to the production of this edition of *Caesura*. They could not have known the challenges that would face them in early 2020 as the pandemic spread to the United States. These students are all to be commended for the effort, time, and spirit that went into producing *Caesura's* 2019–2020 edition.

—Claire McCabe, Faculty Advisor, English Department

Jalen Adams
Faith Bartell
Kiersten Campbell
Jimmy DeMatteo
Amanda DiFilippo
Samantha Ford
Clancy Gates
Kaitlyn Gretencord
Elizabeth Louzeiro

Arlene Opio
Todd Petrella
Michaela Prinzevalli
Isaiah Porter
Olivia Quinci
Frankie Scapoli
Taylor Sedar
Barbora Simacek
Kellie VanDuzer

Awards & Judges

The Elda Wollaeger Gregory Poetry Award*

“Papaver Somniferum” by Kaitlyn Gretencord

“In the Museum of Earthly Horrors” by Christopher Johnson

Academy of American Poets Harold Taylor Prize

“Every Hair is Numbered” by Michael Gregory

The Thomas W. Molyneux Fiction Award

“Love Stories” by Olivia Quinci

The Thomas W. Molyneux Creative Nonfiction Award

“No Longer Oblivious to the Reality of Misdiagnosis” by

Gabrielle Johnson

Caesura Art Award

“Vortex” by Zihan Wu

Iain Haley Pollock has published two collections of poetry: *Ghost, like a Place* (Alice James Books, 2018), which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award and for the Julie Suk Award, and *Spit Back a Boy* (University of Georgia Press, 2011), winner of the 2010 Cave Canem Poetry Prize. Pollock serves as Chair of the English Department at Rye Country Day School in Rye, N.Y., and is a member of the poetry faculty at the Solstice MFA Program of Pine Manor College. In addition, he serves as the poetry editor of *Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*.

Denise Eno Ernest is a painter and photographer with a BFA in Painting from Cornell University’s College of Architecture, Art, and Planning. Her paintings are abstract works in mixed media using a three-dimensional landscape by either creating shapes that attach to her paintings or using the paint itself to create dimensionality using the juxtaposition of paint with silk fabrics. Ernest’s photography centers on looking for the abstract within the real. Ernest’s work can be seen online at *Denise Eno Ernest Studios*, deniseenoernest.com.

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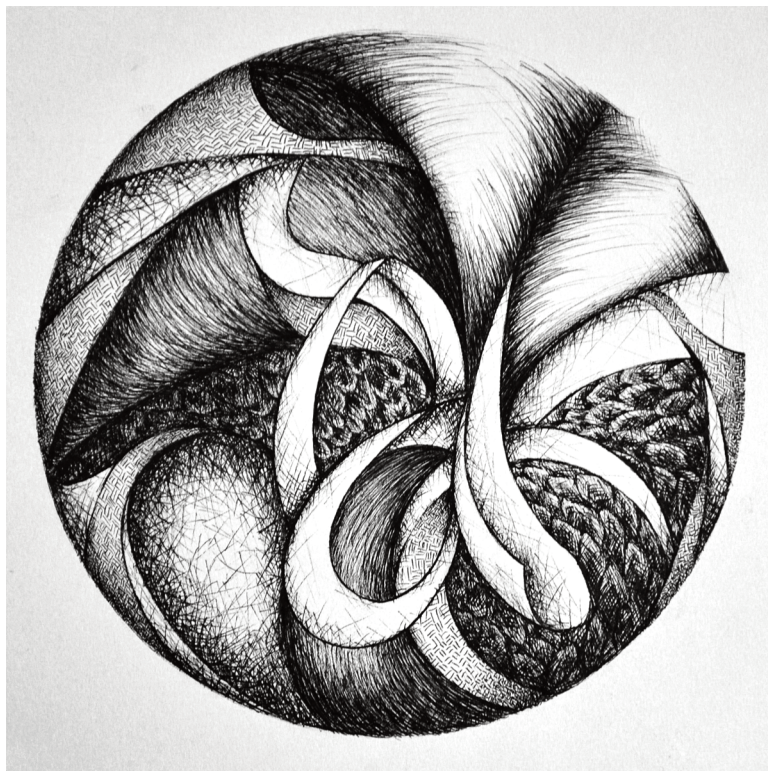
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*Vortex

Illustration by Zihan Wu



**Award Winner*

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POETRY



*Papaver Somniferum

Kaitlyn Gretencord

I live underneath the Elevated Train
Occupying plastic baggies and purple veins
I am shot up, sniffed, snorted, smoked
Fraught with sloth and unprovoked

The people here live like corpses
Staying still from unknown forces
Spiderweb tracks and eyes like ice
Things unsaid and snake eyes with dice

Kensington is like Sheol
Remembering when they were whole
Righteous, unrighteous – all swim here
Crisis after crisis, year after year

Women in cars with men they just met
Men behind bars for the peace they upset
Anything for a score, for a fix
Keep them wanting more, that's my trick

A man here is dying, I'm killing him slowly
Crying out unforgiving hymns, unholy
Breathing is slowed, chances are slim
I wish I wasn't the only one here with him

I wonder: when did his petals fall?
Did someone take his insides and withdrawal
Boiled, filtered, reduced to something sizable
Packaged up and unrecognizable

I think we both miss being flowers
Me a poppy and him unsour
But here we are now on the street
Sizzling on the asphalt with defeat

*Every Hair is Numbered

Michael Gregory

Every granule of dust is deadly
When swallowed whole or taken through the pore
My poverty is reflected completely
In the shattered glass above the broken door
The stairs collapsed, the wallpaper is peeling
Poppies falling slowly towards the floor
Death attempted here, but now he's kneeling
In the shattered glass above the broken door

You woke up and whispered, "I've been faking,
I'm distracted by the siren's urgent horn,
Daunted by the pace of England's shaking
The frontline of where everything is torn."
I turned and said, "You have to leave, it's morning"
Wave the petal, pull the poison thorn
Things, they just don't happen without warning, on
The frontline of where everything is torn

Forget that there's a path that leads to glory
The power marshalled there you cannot keep
There's no beginning, no end to every story
Because you sleep in me and are asleep
The master's hand is heavy on the youngest
Buried with the others, a thousand deep
Rows of stones, and yours seems like the longest
Because you sleep in me and are asleep

I took the crucifixes from the table
You know by now by whom you were deceived
How is it that I find myself ungrateful, for
The blessings I unwittingly received
You look around, you wouldn't know there's trouble
The conflict felt so carelessly conceived
Tonight, I'll go looking through the rubble, for
The blessings I unwittingly received

You believed that every hair was numbered,
Who knew that you were counting from the start,
They've grayed, faded away as I've slumbered
And drifted farther from the matter's heart
But I conferenced with the letters that you left me
I checked your math, you never missed the mark
There's no culprit in love or in theft, but
We're drifting farther from the matter's heart

*In the Museum of Earthly Horrors

Christopher Johnson

1.
drowned boy
frozen in stone
lungs cracked

2.
mother
holds two children
red bumps

3.
father
chest cavity
black soot

4.
metal
bull sliced in two
longways

5.
small house
hall cavity
black soot

6.
metal
put inside boy
by boy

7.
plaque reads
"With no North Stars
they blind."

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**Award Winner*

A Thank You Note to My Body

Thuy Blumenfeld

They say you can bite off your finger
as easily as you can bite into a carrot;
your brain just tells you not to.
So thank you, brain, for all the dumb shit
you have stopped me from doing,
from biting off my finger
to pushing the knife in deep enough.

They say the definition of insanity
is doing something over and over
and expecting different results.
So thank you, skin, for going insane
and closing up my wrists every time,
even though we both knew it wouldn't be long
until I was bleeding again.

Thank you, body, for enduring the autopsy
I performed while you were still breathing;
for not giving up in the middle of the night,
even when it was all I dreamed about.

Thank you for doing everything
I begged you not to do;
for waking up in the morning,
for breathing,
for living.

His Prerogative

Marvin Smith

"In the beginning, the media was calling me a bad boy all the time because of the way I act and feel onstage. None of them have ever taken the time to get to know me when I climb offstage."

—Bobby Brown

Crowds hate I make my own decisions,
crowding my prerogative.
Prepping, wopping and bopping to microphone beatings—
knowing my prerogative.

With time weathered bones, aged vocal tones-
everybody's talking about me.
Why can't I live my life the way I desire,
showing my prerogative?

Constant toxicity I've created,
Perpetuated—I can do just what I feel.
I see nothing wrong with spreading myself around,
hoeing my prerogative.

'Til my lovers call me Bobby,
begging to not be cruel.
'Til I end up alone from fruits of rocks I've been
sowing. My prerogative.

Season of Smoke and Death

Bob Sheehan

Like confetti suggesting the charm
of dying, leaves leave in crowds

like children giddy with blindness
and a life with no future.

The taste in the air worries
and sweetly lacerates the blood

giving us a message of death and
anonymous continuation where

rocks and pearls share a destination
and a molecular flair for disappearance.

Strata of color crave importance and
scream immoderate intention without

definition. There is a careering
cacophony toward a sententiously

unsentimental, silent unknown. An unremembering
of names and essential equations. A thinly

favored contention that cold is our
completing condition, correct convention.

And there is a wildness of free fall here claiming
we cannot make mistakes, here we only do

what we are conceived to do, we only fall free.
But we fall away from the flame-out of color and flavored
winds

into crescent fissures of uncensored winter where
black trees - like Lazarus's creviced fingers -

reach with satisfying desperation.

You forgot to Turn Down the Bed

Jimmy DeMatteo

"That's not dirt – That's good clean earth"

—Eugene O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*

Buried far beneath long grass seas
And tilled clays
And pines
And tapped maples. All over is the point not just flowers.
But, Buried under flowerbeds
Shaped by ocean beds and riverbeds and marriage beds and
gardeners' feet.
Buried under the rolling mountains of petals,
Before he grew roots and walked away,
Before you pulled up your roots and walked away with him.
Both knocking boots and roots' dirt off to feed yourselves.
Buried under the Yarrow I'd grown for you
Buried under the Aster I'd grown for you.
I had grown for you.
Away from my surface noise.
Towards your deep, deafening silence.
Towards the untouched patch buried under all the arguments
of fermented attachment.
Buried under all our spoiled memories
Left as centerpieces in off season cottages,
A treat for the stray eyes of the chance stranger,
The trespasser dancing with the betrayer.
There the gardener tended to you like I used to do.
Here you lie buried under the floral epitaph I wrote
To outlast the both of us and your
Blood buried under my fingernails,
The polish I'll wear to my deathbed.

Economists Get Off on Impossible Questions

Joshua Yawn

How can every people poor and all,
have a job and money through the squall?

Or a house that's built with fired bricks,
that's a product of some government pricks?

How can noble, suit people
not have their throats choked?

So when it's all said and done,
a business can run and run and run.

Money, mi amor
Fuck the poor
Bourgeois?
No. It's for me

Use your reason and stop pretending
to have answers to impossible questions.

I'm writin this while I'm drunk

Kevin Jeffrey Amadeus Johnson

I'm writin this while I'm drunk
But I dont give a fuck
Cause it's still some real funk
And I gettin more dough than Scrooge McDuck
I'm swimmin in it, pleasure women in it
They find gold coins where the sun don't hit em and
its honestly obvious that I'm spittin you some lies
But who cares its entertaining and rhymes

Besides, who knows what the future holds
Hell if Trump can be POTUS
I could date hot models and have a pool full of gold
My image spreadin like green and black mold
And Risin up in forbes like my nippis in the cold
While I'm Buyin my happiness till I'm wrinkled and old
I croak, Get buried in a diamond coffin and live it up as a ghost
Eatin caviar in heaven with Marilyn Monroe
We clink glasses, exchange glances, and then I'm movin
 closer to her lips than her mole
As I throw the middle finger up to Joe Dimaggio
Then suddenly I feel a heat crawl up my spine
I whip around to the see Satan himself barrel in from behind

He grabs me by the throat and says
"I don't know how you got through"
Frantically I scream what in hell did I do
He says huh nothin yet, but don't worry you'll be there soon
Now everyone in heavens starin, thinkin Im a goon
But I dont mind cause goonies never say die
So I kick Satan in the nuts and spit in his eye
he just laughs as my spit sizzles away
Haha I'm evil itself why even try and goin for my nuts huh
 what r u gay
I hung my head in defeat no more tricks up my sleeve

I opened my mouth but before I can speak he yells
Greed!
Then I realized that never once in my life charity crossed my
mind
And having all my money just burned when I died probably
wasn't that wise
But I worked hard to earn it so was it really a crime
After all it's all mine
Still, Satan drags me past Peter through the pearly gates
His claws burn on my wrists as they emanate hate
Then he throws me through the clouds
And I swiftly plummet down through the ground
And onto three headed hound

Cerberus! I think. But his name tag reads Sparky
His breath smells of death, and his teeth snap sharply
I slide down his back, with fur black as night
Dodging monstrous paws as they swipe with pure spite
Then all three of his jaws are poised to bite
But a "Ding" rings out and he suddenly freezes
I feel the chilling wisps of cold breezes

An elevator appears in a puff of choking smoke
And Satan glares at me like I'm some kind of joke
Then he steps out
With a smug grin
Opens the red hot gates of hell, and we walk in
Ready to repent for my sins
But as the first flame starts to singe my skin
A bright light takes over and my body convulses
I hear a low buzz and the sound of voices
Clear! I hear
And my body jerks again
I look up and an EMT stares down
Holy shit, I think.
I left the stove on

I am the diorism of isolation

Kimberly Santiago

Tacent [soundless] as I stumble, as I
run towards
you, my own absolute reflection.
Tumultuary [for a short while], my mind races
on a race track meant to please you.
Holocryptic [indecipherable], my life lights up as I dive
into the darkest
deep end of the cool lake,
endless in depth yet
mysterious. Floating within, I
yearn to learn more about
something, anything that will
explain my future. I can't
love myself knowing that I am
forever haunted by dreams.

I try to hide myself.

Our Holy Father

Edward Benner

In the name of the father,
The Son, and
The Holy Spirit.

*6:50 PM local time: Fire starts in roof of Notre-Dame Cathedral,
according to firefighters*

My knees are bruised from kneeling
on the pew all these years:
Pious stigmata.

You said you didn't trust it—
Nothing's perfect—tainted.

*7:40 PM local time: Fire spreads to the giant spire of Notre-Dame
Cathedral*

He hated gays, Catholics, Muslims, and anyone that didn't
look and think like him,
But he loved you (I think)
as fathers should.

Why am I still explaining myself?

7:53 PM local time: Cathedral's spire collapses

He's a child of God: an infallible disciple.
He's a bigot: a hateful manipulator.
And you are just lost
and trapped
in his web of lies and deceit.

8:07 PM local time: Entire roof of Notre-Dame collapses

He makes sure his son knows the price
of loving men,
Only because he hopes to have company where he is going:
Bathing in fire and turning to dust.

No one will answer our prayers.

Khalid bin Mohsen Shaari

Clancy Gates

The Saudi king made the world's largest man lose his title out of embarrassment

He went from 1300 to 150 pounds in 4 years

I look in the mirror and I want Olympic swimmer shoulders. My right trapezius muscle (diagonal from the shoulder to the neck) is twenty times bigger than the left.

I look in the mirror and I want all the hair gone. I could shave every day but it grows back in a day and my skin gets red and bumpy.

I look in the mirror and all my fingers start falling off. I try to touch my face but can only bat at it with useless palms.

he was right and the king was wrong

make your body exceptional let the king be embarrassed

Whirlpool

Jenn Rust

“There,” I said
“There’s the whirlpool that swallowed me
Whole. That one right there.”

You anchored your body
To the sea floor
Watching the water spin clockwise
And you didn’t even know what was in store.

It was angry and brass.
You stared it down from the mass.
I am so sorry, I brought you into this
This was my monster to conquer
But you wouldn’t listen,
You thought you were the cure
I thought that too.

In complete silence of the sea
You leapt off the ship and into the breach
Like I said, it was horrible
It was no ordinary creature
With a head of water, it ate with a large
Sack of stomach
Putrid with stink and acid.

I waited on the boat,
Hoping I would soon see you float
The sky turned pale and then yellow
And then dark
I knew I’d never see you again
I knew it would tear you apart

I stared at the whirlpool
And it stared back

Immersion and Illumination

Susan Schatz

Folks on high ground keep the watch
steaming sand under feet, beams of brightness overhead
murky lagoon calls to little girls
desperate to get wet.
Sister beside me, tickled pink, water to her waist
reaches out a gleeful hand to catch a glint
of phosphorescence surface shine.
Curious child, a spirited imp, head underwater
in an innocent instant.
Sudden movement on the hill,
flying flash, pounding footfalls
he covers ground as brilliant rays
lead the way, can't let his baby drown.
Heart stopping race, nick of time
he catches her vanishing ankle and pulls
her up in a blaze of brilliance.
Angelic smile, his moppet sparkles and laughs
"I knew you'd save me, Daddy,"
as he sweats in the sun.

Prayer Card

Dominique Kendus

Night time becomes a hymn in itself,
sleep a prayer I have long forgotten.
My hands clenched in a fist,
crinkling the prayer card until
his smile folds in half
like that miserable metal frame.

I un-crinkle and smooth quickly,
taking his face in the palm of my hand
and look again to his sleeping body.
I weep. Silently. My prayers
are just a string of vowels:
no god or heaven ever mentioned.
There is only sleep and
please wake.

There is no waking for me or for him.
There is only the wrinkled prayer card
and one last glance before I turn away
and resume the journey home.

Homebound

Zihan Wu

I wish I were a hermit crab
Floating free upon the sea

what should i be
what should i be

~

Should I risk braving ocean waves?
Should I ride the tide ashore?

so much to explore
too much to explore

If I built myself a boat
Dare I sail somewhere remote?
Would I sink or would I float?

questions washing down my throat

Nearing the horizon line
What if Seagull flocks arrive?
When do Herons wine and dine?
Will the Ducks eat me alive?

would i survive
they could be right

~

I am a floating hermit crab
Free to venture through the sea

to be safe or to be sound
homebound

Precious

Illustration by Zihan Wu



CREATIVE NONFICTION



*No Longer Oblivious to the Reality of Misdiagnosis

Gabrielle Johnson

I was sitting in the Caesar Rodney Dining Hall at the University of Delaware with my soccer teammates and a few other student athletes, about two months after my first stomach surgery. As students filed into the dining hall on a late Saturday morning, the tables were full, the lines were long, and the chatter was contagious. My friends and I laughed throughout brunch and, while I tried to ignore the inevitable, I anticipated the harrowing moment—the moment of distinct and all too familiar discomfort, pain, and unease. I had eaten almost an entire plate of food, which was predictably too good to be true. I ate one more small bite when the downward spiral began. A lump formed in my throat; food was stuck, unable to pass from my esophagus into my stomach. Slowly, my eyes began to water, my head dropped, my shoulders pressed back: a practiced routine for times like this. As the food started to rise, so did I. I got up out of my seat and walked as quickly and inconspicuously as possible to the restroom. While making my exit, I prayed the bathroom was empty. I dreaded vomiting with others nearby. I worried, with rightful concern, that another student would call Student Services, believing I was a freshman girl suffering from bulimia. When, in fact, bulimia was in stark opposition to my daily reality. Unlike the trajectory of some with eating disorders, all I wanted was to eat normally and regularly.

I was always the girl with a stomachache. Every year for Christmas I received Pepto Bismol in my stocking. When driving home after soccer games, I sat with my knees pulled into my chest, the only way to ease the pain. For countless hours after a meal, I would lay on the ground with a pillow under my stomach, hoping to ease my stomach's distress. I have taken and tried every single medication and diet plan prescribed by a plethora of doctors. During my freshman season playing soccer for Division 1 University of Delaware, I

would run from the field, mid-practice in almost unbearable pain, to take whatever medicine was in my soccer bag.

Two years ago, on December 18th, 2017, I had a Nissen Fundoplication surgery. This procedure is performed laparoscopically to fix and eliminate acid-reflux disease. The surgeon blows up the stomach to the size of a nine-month-pregnant woman, then wraps the top of the stomach around the lower section of the esophagus. With this stomach wrap, acid is less likely to travel into the esophagus. Although a Nissen Fundoplication is typically performed on the elderly, I, an 18-year-old girl, had “the worst symptoms and numbers” of GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease) my doctor had ever seen. Such numbers necessitated a full wrap of my stomach around my esophagus.

When first speaking with my doctors, the idea of overdiagnosis never crossed my mind. But, in the United States, overdiagnosing is quite common. Medicine is easily accessible and often affordable, so doctors prescribe medicine with more availability than ever before. Rather than promoting and encouraging a healthier lifestyle, doctors suggest treatment with prescriptions. Medicine is often an easier, less taxing solution to medical conditions.

Overdiagnosing and overprescribing are dangerous methodologies that have negatively affected the quality of life for millions of patients. Sadly, while overdiagnosis is incredibly problematic, equally problematic is underdiagnosis. Not receiving a diagnosis at all is less common, and perhaps, less discussed, but causes great suffering.

As a Division 1 student-athlete, living on a liquid diet is next to impossible. In the spring of 2018, I threw up nearly every meal I consumed, stumping my gastroenterologist, sports-medicine doctor, and nutritionist. My unusual vomiting and

gastro problems were confusing, and therefore, went unresolved. Medical experts from North Carolina to New York suspected they were complications from the Nissen procedure; however, there was no roadmap to resolution. Unsure of how to properly fuel my body, a liquid diet became the only available option. In my dorm room, with a tiny silver Nutribullet, I made shakes three times a day. For weeks on end, I trained vigorously without enough nutrients to sustain a non-athlete, let alone one with the demands of intense two-hour training sessions.



“Everyone on the line,” yelled my coach after a particularly grueling practice. His words were infamous, signaling post-practice fitness drills, and they washed over our team with dread. After running 3,300-yard shuttles, my legs weakened and faltered. This, however, was not the normal tired leg feeling I experienced after regularly running during post-practice throughout most of my soccer career. The feeling was something different, something scary. “3, 2, 1... Go,” my coach yelled. I started off the line, slower than I would have liked. My legs felt like sandbags, my eyesight started to blur. As I worked and ran and with one more length of the shuttle to complete, black spots formed in my eyes. I somehow continued to run, though I could hardly see, my body only operating from mindless muscle memory. I crossed the line and ran straight to my athletic trainer, hanging my arms around her neck, clinging to her for support. My body was shutting down, purely exhausted, fatigued, and deprived.

After hours in the emergency room, the doctor said I was malnourished. I was placed on practice restriction until after spring break. As time passed, the protein shakes became nearly unbearable. They were thick, gross, unappetizing, and did little to aid my dietary needs. Further, the fatigue was still

exhausting, debilitating, and uncomfortable. I visited an eye doctor to order glasses to ease the eyestrain and headaches that accompany malnutrition and hypotension, potential side effects that were at no point disclosed to me, side effects that wreaked havoc on my body and spirit.

Spring break came and went. My mom was determined to help, making soft foods cut into the tiniest of pieces. I ate a small amount of regular food without throwing up, and I was ecstatic. I returned to school with an uncanny eagerness to update my sports medicine doctor on the progress I made over break.

I was cleared to practice fully at 5 p.m., and I was never happier. I had been through so much; so much had been taken from me due to acid reflux. When the doctor said that I could train that day without restrictions, I may have floated out of the office. Her words were literally music to my ears. It appeared as though I was making progress and that my health was returning to normalcy.

The music of hope, happiness, and satisfaction was short lived.

Three hours later, at 8 p.m., on April 3rd, I intercepted a pass with the outside of my foot. As I placed my foot onto the turf, my right knee bent outward. I heard two pops, and, as I fell in seemingly slow motion before I hit the ground, I knew my fate. I caught my body with my arms, my right knee still bent. As my trainers rushed over, I sat on the ground. At least ten times, I saw it happen with my own eyes. I heard hundreds of stories. The pit in my stomach grew, tears filled my eyes, the silence was deafening. As my trainer pulled my knee out from under me, and I was carried off the field, visions of a year-long recovery swarmed my head. My ACL was torn.

Very simply put, my body was not ready to practice after months of malnutrition. A liquid diet, while full of vitamins, is not satisfactory for a collegiate athlete. A few days later, as I watched our team lift weights, my strength and conditioning coach said, “Gabs I am so sorry. I couldn’t believe it when they told me it was torn. You are so strong. I never thought this would happen to you.” More disappointingly than one can imagine, I was cleared to play far too soon. I simply did not have enough calories or nutrients to remain strong enough for a Division 1 soccer practice. My trainer, my strength and conditioning coach, and my physical therapist all said that malnutrition caused me to tear my ACL.

I cannot help but wonder if maybe I had been more careful, or if I had been steered in a different direction, my ACL injury would not have occurred. Admittedly, I felt cheated by my doctor. How could someone who knew my entire medical background, the immense strength required to play collegiate athletics, and who had studied the human body endlessly let this happen? I learned a valuable lesson. As it turns out, many doctors make mistakes. And innocently, I thought such mistakes would never happen again. Not to me at least.

With the extensive recovery required for a torn ACL, I pushed the idea of being misdiagnosed or underdiagnosed to the back of my mind.

“I am sorry to say that my best recommendation is that you go back in and fix the original procedure.” Sitting on the cold, crinkly paper-covered doctors table, I received this news from my new gastroenterologist, the latest doctor to review my extensive medical history. My mother was out of town but called to listen to my conversation with the doctor, to ask questions, and ask for clarification. I normally recounted information with her after each appointment, but I had an instinct I would need her real-time support. Having attended

more than 50 appointments thus far, I anticipated the news. I was almost a “mini-stomach expert” at this point, so I expected the conversation to go a certain way. My doctor turned on the television to review my charts and results from testing two weeks prior. My head spun with anxiety, nerves, and confusion, a mirror image of the squiggly and colored lines of the charts themselves. Tapping my foot, my normal sign of stress, I awaited the news my doctor would recount.

“It turns out that recent testing from the manometry shows you have esophageal dysfunction. This was unknown when you had your first surgery. If your other doctor and surgeon had known this, you would have had a partial wrap, rather than the full wrap you have now.”

Once my doctor left the room and my mom hung up the phone, I rushed out of the office, feeling the tears building and burning. As I tried to hold in my emotions of defeat, future pain, and past pain, my car seemed acres away. The second I unlocked the door and climbed into the passenger seat of my Honda Pilot; tears began streaming silently down my face.

Before my first Nissen procedure, I had not been tested for esophageal dysfunction. Imagine a three-foot-long iPhone charging cord shoved up your nose, snaking its way down your throat. Then every 10 seconds, you swallow a sip of liquid that is syringed into your mouth. You cannot swallow unless told otherwise, even though this iPhone cord makes it impossible to not swallow. This is manometry testing. Manometry tests the capability and functioning proficiency of the esophagus. Manometry testing should be done prior to Nissen procedure, because it tests the functioning of the esophagus. With a fully functioning esophagus, food can pass easily into the stomach with a full Nissen stomach wrap. With an improperly functioning esophagus, food has trouble

passing into the stomach, as swallowing is problematic. Adding a full Nissen wrap to the equation, the food might not pass from the throat into the stomach. This testing should always be performed prior to implementing a Nissen Fundoplication. My doctor and surgeon never performed this crucial study.

Although a plethora of tests were run prior to my surgery, one of extremely high importance was never considered or mentioned. My doctor correctly diagnosed my horrendous acid reflux. But my esophageal dysfunction was only found post-surgery.

The full Nissen wrap, combined with the recently discovered esophageal dysfunction, is the cause of food remaining in my throat. For this reason, I have my second Nissen surgery scheduled for December 2019 at Duke Medical Center with the Chief of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery. The full stomach wrap will be undone into a partial wrap, in order to accommodate both my acid reflux and esophageal dysfunction.

Medical misdiagnoses are a growing and scary trend that happen across all spectrums of medicine, from mental illness, to cancer, to asthma, to incorrect prescriptions. I never thought I could be the subject of misdiagnosis not only once, but twice. I have learned through multiple surgeries and setbacks to be more astute, more direct, and more inquisitive in all aspects of my life, my healthcare most certainly included.

The Buses Should Run For Me: Commentary, Fanny Fern Style

Brenden Moore

Off they go, off they go. Hmph! But without much real direction or purpose. They are wildly inefficient. I, of course, write about the UD bus routes, which at the beginning of the year seemed neat; now they seem like they suffer from some fatal flaws.

Look how they spend 10 minutes waiting at one stop, making me later and later for class. Or there was one instance when a disgruntled freak didn't wait more than 10 seconds at a stop, whilst I waived my arms right in front of him. What shall you choose: one second wait, or three days?

I mean, why should he wait? We only pay \$30,000 or more to study here. And—oh my—I think they are raising the tuition again by tacking on some new fee. Brilliant!

Here's the thing: the buses are either running too slowly, or too fast, or they are in such proximity to one another that you would think, "One of these buses will never get to me. Maybe by next year...." And then, of course, if it's in the evening—or if you had made the mistake of wanting to be transported across from one point to another on the weekend—Heaven forbid—then good luck! Your route might have one, maybe two buses running; and, on the weekends, some bus routes *are not even in operation*.

So, shall I walk then? In many cases, sure. I am glad to have that ability.

But for \$30,000 a year, if I should want to take a bus either out of necessity that the distance is particularly long or

because I am too tired or what have you, I should not have to deal with unruly customer service, or long waits, or, worse yet, for there to be a total absence of any motorized transport. This is the 21st century, and society has not collapsed into anarchy just yet, so I should like to be able to take a bus in an effortless or an almost-effortless fashion.

Not to pile onto the bandwagon and certainly not to “virtue signal” (I know the next statement will be so brave and original), but what of the Europeans? It’s rumored that they can run buses like it’s nothing. But time and time again, we see that U.S. cities are inundated with bureaucracy, corruption, and inefficiency. They’re flooded with paperwork into all their various departments, with their almost comical amount of government employees (see your local municipal office), and their endless programs. Yet they can’t figure out how to run a bus route? Or finish a road construction project in less than a century, for that matter....

Technically, it is the University’s bus route. But with its own police force, legal authority, government (taxpayer) money, and its relations with the City of Newark, it may as well be considered as something akin to a governing body.

Honestly, I am appreciative to God for all of the blessings and nice day-to-day things like transportation. It was a pleasant surprise when I first arrived at the University, and I thought the buses to be rather neat. But for \$30,000 a year, I’ve got a better idea for the University: sell the buses and outfit a bunch of taxis for students. Sure, it might clog up the motorway, and you’d probably instantly run into scarcity issues, but it

would be a lot more direct. And as the city has shown, they don't really care about causing traffic—pretty soon they'll probably shut down every road in Newark at once: "city-wide road construction," they'll call it. "Keeping the unions working," they'll say... and won't it be swell... *if* the construction workers can make it to work (I hope they don't plan on going by car).

Or an even better idea: keep the buses going, but furnish me with my own vehicle and my own chauffeur. I get my money's worth, and in return, the University President can get photo ops with me, and advertise to all the new prospective students about "how accommodating" this educational institution can be, especially when it comes to things mostly unrelated to education.

Home

Clancy Gates



My family moved here when I was one, so it's all I know! That's my mom's old mini-van in the driveway, which my dad crashed on Christmas. She drives a Subaru now. I wonder when this picture was taken.¹

When I'm outside I feel like it's fall, regardless of what season it is. I'm used to being outside in the fall because that's when I ran cross-country in high school. The fall is a delicate balance of cold and warmth that makes my nose red and my blood thin. The fall makes me sentimental. The winter makes me sad.

When I'm not doing well, I spend too much time at home. In the winter you have to stay inside a lot, or else your fingers will fall off. During my sophomore year of college, I shared a house with two friends. I moved out of my childhood home; I had my own—different from this one. It doesn't feel right to be here anymore, in a house that was mine and then wasn't.

They just cut the tree down, one day while I was at school. There are no pictures yet. I could take one by taking twenty steps out the front door, but it's

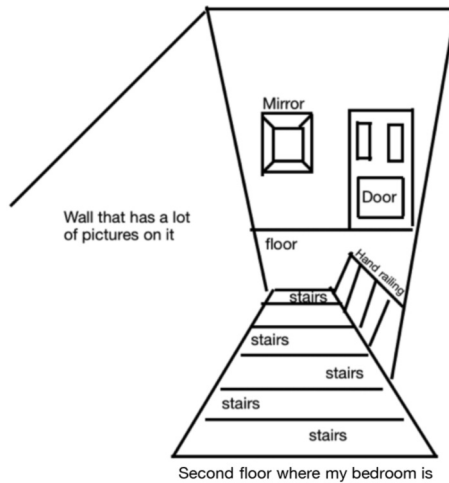


¹ It's from August 2012, later than I thought. Here is another picture from 2007.

wintertime and my fingers might fall off. I hate the word “autumn.” Fall is a perfect word.

What color is the front door? I remember it red.² I know my mom painted it red at some point.

I’ve had a falling dream for as long as I can remember. I can will myself to have it if I think about it hard enough when I’m going to bed. I walk out of my bedroom and to the stairs. I look down at the bottom of the stairs and I jump. Ten years ago, I would’ve described it as flying; I have more words now and know it’s a drift, a fading into the fabric at the bottom of the stairs. A terrifyingly slow journey to the mirror next to the front door.



Floating down it at an unnatural pace, because nothing in nature floats like that. A parachute on a skydiver. I guess like the seed pods that fall from trees. They spin rapidly on the way down, though. I *float* down at the speed they fall, but I’m still. My arms are extended like Superman.



² like fall

I've had three bedrooms in the same house. I think I actually started off in my current one, which was a nursery, then an office, then my sister Michaela's room. Now my room. That's this room's whole story.

I must have left this room, which is right next to the top of the stairs³, before I started memories. I had the first and only and biggest room on the right side of the hallway and it had paintings of Calvin and Hobbes. My sister, Riley, was born and took it. I moved to the room at the end of the hallway, which is second smallest. My mom and I painted astronauts on the walls, and I lived in there for, I'm going to say, 16 years.

Michaela and Riley shared a bunk bed. The nursery/office/bedroom was an office. Then it was a bedroom for Michaela. I went to college, and Michaela took my room at the end of the hallway, and I took this one.



Environment is everything:

- i) Place
- ii) Nature
- iii) Surrounding
- iv) Temperature
- v) Computing the overall structure within which a user, computer, or program operates.
"a desktop development environment"

My home doesn't feel like my bedrock—it's not as if it raised me. It was here when I grew up, and it's here when I come home, and my dogs live here. I can always go here and see my dogs. My mom and dad might be out, but my dogs are always here.

³ At the top of the stairs, you'll face a door. Open this for a bathroom. Turn to the right and my parents' room is there. Turn to the left for a short hallway.

Coming home is returning to the usual. I go to college 20 minutes away from here, and coming home, in a literal sense, is easy. The usual is distant. The usual is obscured by all the unusual, and it blends together like a smoothie.

Many of the people at my college live much farther away, and logistics only allows them to go home once or twice each semester. Finishing their finals is a huge deal. They build up stress but know that their home/usual is in sight. I finish and drive my car for 20 minutes and lay down on the couch.



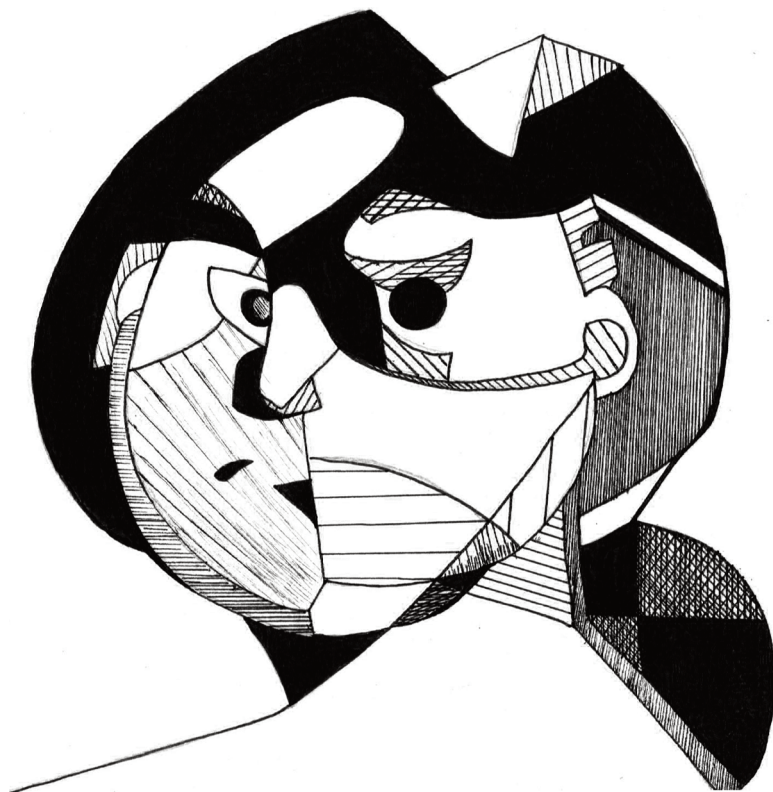
In the basement there is a raised crawlspace area that doesn't have floor besides some tarps over the compacted dirt. We keep Christmas decorations and Halloween decorations in it. I crawl into it when my dad asks me to grab something, and it does not feel like a part of the house.

It's so dark and so foreign. I've always had a sneaking suspicion that someone lives in there. I've thought about it a lot: he would have to coordinate with my parents so that we (the children) could never see him, and I don't think my parents would be this cooperative with the type of man that lives in a crawlspace.

So I ruled out the existence of a crawlspace-man, by all logic. I need to find a new explanation for noises and oddities. I guess the house is settling.

Abstraction

Illustration by Zihan Wu



FICTION



*Love Stories

Olivia Quinci

I set the timer for thirty minutes—five to five-thirty in the afternoon. The thirty minutes where I have nothing in the schedule, no script tweaking, no editing, no costume or prop shopping. I'm just going to type out whatever I feel on this laptop, because it's going to be the only thing that keeps me sane. Helping manage a YouTube channel does not offer a lot of free time, especially if you're way behind on getting costumes, because Sandra wants a pink wig as a metaphor for a vagina...as if people would actually get that! It's okay...it's okay....

I wouldn't normally be doing this; I usually would tell myself that I didn't have the time. Last week was just like that: filled with script writing and revising, research, and looking at new set pieces, but in the midst of all that I had dozed off. I didn't mean to, and it wasn't for very long. Just thirty minutes. Just like now. But I woke up, and suddenly I could type out the ending of the script like I had planned it all week. Mind-blowing, right? Who knew that if I actually got some rest and some time to decompress that I would function better. So, this is my thirty minutes for today—Jen time—Jen's time to do whatever she damn well pleases. Not to say that I *don't* do what I please for a living already. I suppose.

And so, I begin, the Austen-esque fluff-fantasy that I've been dreaming of whenever my mind wanders. Austen's work is much more witty satire than fluff, but no one wants to hear that. My love for romance novels is a dark secret of mine, though. It's not very intellectual. It's not about politics or about man's inner beast whenever he falls into insanity over and over again. For the sake of what you think is my embarrassment, I will admit that some romance novels are trash. I would never get one where the cover looked like a fashion shoot if that's what you were asking. The best ones, though, are about imperfect people trying to create perfect situations and failing miserably. I love laughing at their

foibles, I gush at their awkwardness, I love most of all that despite their mistakes they seem to make it work out, and when they don't, they have something to learn from it. I love weddings. I will admit that as you roll your eyes. They're beautiful messes. Between budgeting and fidgeting over cake designs and scheming mothers-in-law, people try so hard to remember that it's about your union, but no one ever does. It all works out in the end though, at least in the stories.

Of course, that's never true in real life. We find mistakes in each other, and it's miserable. No matter what we're told from inspirational posters, we strive for that nonexistent perfection. We chip away at ourselves like marble statues. We aim to look like the David, but we don't stop until we're piles of dust. We get bitter. Things stop being goofy and playful. We try to raise the stakes by doing something like BDSM, or polyamory. We try to meet dangerous and exciting people until we realize that everyone else is just as lame as we are.

But I can't worry about that now, just keep going.

Ophelia finally rested her back, still standing, on the trunk of the tree. The top of the hill was her favorite part of town, as it gave her a perfect view of her home village below. She knew she couldn't stay out for long, but there was a need for her to clear her mind. She had finally come to the horrifying conclusion that she felt for the new doctor. She found herself in a position where she could not apply her usual cold detachment to the events surrounding her and that she would actually have to be vulnerable. Suddenly, she found someone walking up the hill as well, perhaps not seeing her. She focused on his face and felt the urge to run. It was him, and Ophelia was about to perish from embarrassment.

My phone buzzes. Don't answer it. Don't answer it. Don't answer it. Two weeks. That's not a lot of time. Just for a second. It's Mark. Christ!

Did you get the draft done yet?

No, I didn't get the fucking draft done yet! I told you I was going to be busy now!

I put the phone back in my pocket and try to continue, but, of course, I get to the point where I can't think of anything else. Mark is going to hate it. It felt like a lot more than three months ago when he told me:

I feel like your writing has been getting lazy lately.

It's tough working with your boyfriend. At first, I loved it, because I finally found someone who I thought shared a similar creative wavelength with me. Finally, I didn't have to get into any arguments about career or politics like with my college exes. When I first met Mark, he used to say things like:

This is seriously genius.

Or

I never thought I would meet a girl as smart as she was pretty.

I never knew that my writing could be seductive. Now it's...I don't know what. The dialogue is empty and the characters feel flat. Suddenly I'm hunched over the script, switching out one useless synonym for another, wondering if I'm being too wordy—I'm always too wordy.

A benefit to working was that it always gave everything a sense of immediacy. We had to work it out right then and there, instead of pretending to smooth things over with some "Natural Lights" at the next party. On the other hand, when you work with your boyfriend, you're always at work, especially with a job like this, with uncertain pay and no strict hours. Like all my other brilliant ideas from graduating college, this didn't pan out the way I thought either.

"You okay, 'car keys'?" A familiar voice asks me. It's James, the waiter at the café—an actor by night, as is per usual in Los Angeles. He calls me "car keys" because the first time I came into the place, he noted how loud my keys (not just to the car, of course) jingled when I walked. Occasionally, he does it in a terrible Boston accent to make it sound like "khakis."

Suddenly, I remember what I was supposed to be doing. James has a way of reminding me where I am in the world—not in a mental vortex of drafts and deadlines, but in a café with strange orange and white tiling. I look back at the timer on my phone. My thirty minutes have whittled down to nineteen. I have the rest of the day to work on the script. Then I get the idea: what if he just read it? The novel. Then I'll know if it'll actually be worthwhile.

"Actually, James, can you do me a favor?"

"Sure."

"I'm working on...a kind of a short story. Can you look at it really quick?" God, what the hell was I doing? He's probably busy and he probably thinks it'll suck anyway. He's legit, not some cretin in content creating trying to write a poor excuse for a novel.

"Sure, just give me a minute. I need to get these plates to the kitchen."

Well, that was surprising. Hopefully this doesn't go as badly as I fear. I hope he doesn't think this is going to be turned into a script or something. I'm sure he means well, but actors will suck up to even the slightest whiff of a job. Now, I just have to make sure that he's being genuine when he actually reads it—

“Okay, I’m all set.” James is suddenly sitting across from me, and now I actually have to turn over the laptop to him. I knew I could change just two or three more things, but I knew he wasn’t really on break. I scroll to the top.

“Here you go.”

I wait for the eventual rejection. He’s going to lean back in his seat with a sympathetic expression and say something terribly vague like *that’s interesting* or *it’s alright*. If he were actually somewhat merciful, he would throw in *it could use some work*—

He emits a chuckle and a smirk runs across his face.

“I knew this was crap!” I reach over to grab the laptop back. “Sorry, this is a first draft and—”

“Wait, stop!” He brushes my hands away. His smile has grown across his face and his cheeks have some color.

“This is nice!”

Engine Memories

Nana Ohemaa Asante

Water fills up the inside of the car slowly. The pressure of the lake rushing into the car frightens it, but there is nothing it can do. The girl inside of the car is still strapped to the driver's seat. She is unconscious. The car panics. She is just a girl, not old like the leather seat she sits on, not worn and cracked from years of use.

The car remembers the day it was made—September 8, 1996—in Japan. It wonders if it was conscious before its parts were put together. But it has no memory before this date, just that it exists now. It is a Toyota Camry with blood-red paint covering the exterior. It imagines that this red is its blood and that it is living when the engine roars. There's no need for organic compounds to prove signs of life when inorganic compounds seem to suffice. It does not understand why it knows its existence; it just knows.

It has never met any other cars like it. Or perhaps it has, but it does not understand how to communicate beyond the metal exterior. So, it sat in silence. There are no words for cars to use, no language except the constant mutter of the engine, the creak of the brakes.

It remembers Japanese hands putting it together using foreign pieces. Metals from around the world molded to form just one car. It is an amalgamation of the handiwork of many people, all who worked separately for it to later exist. It knows its real purpose is transportation, not beauty or luxury. It understands in some morbid way that beauty is fleeting and that it will only be the most sought-after car for a short time. Maybe a year at most. It begrudgingly accepts this conclusion. There is no way to fight this, no one to argue or plead with to become more desirable. So, it sat in silence.

The Camry remembers each of its owners vividly, the memory imprinted into the carpet and its leather seats. Edward, a

middle-class businessman with a wife and two kids. He always seemed stressed, papers spilling out of his suitcase, slipping under the seats. His youngest child constantly spilled her snacks all over the interior of the car. Juice laying in the sun, making the seats sticky and leaving an overtly sweet scent. The car decided that it did not like young children, at least the ones who did not clean up after themselves and left its interior messy. But it was a car, just guided by paper-cut hands on a steering wheel. So, it sat in silence.

Edward's stress had eventually paid off, and with a promotion he immediately replaced the Camry. "It's too small," Edward convinced his wife. "We need something better. We've outgrown it." Edward took the Camry to a used car dealership, replacing the car with a brand-new Benz, never looking back to say "goodbye" or "thank you." There is no reason to thank a car, after all. After years of sitting in the used car lot, the car was passed on to a new owner, Mazaa, an Ethiopian immigrant who arrived in the U.S.A. to send money back to his family. This was Mazaa's first major expense in a new land. So every day he woke up early to clean the seats and made sure the car looked presentable. Mazaa treated the car with reverence, something that shocked the Camry. He would periodically place cheap pine air fresheners from the dollar store on the rear-view mirror to remind himself of his home in Ethiopia. The natural smell made the car feel free, as if cruising down on wide country roads, and it reveled in the scent. Some days, Mazaa would sit behind the wheel, and on the days where the scent was the strongest, and homesickness and pining for his family was its thickest, he would cry silently after parking the car in his apartment lot. The Camry liked Mazaa way more than it liked Edward and wanted to console him, but there was nothing it could do beside feel the drops of Mazaa's tears on its steering wheel and muffle the sounds of his sobs with its windows and rumble of its engine. Although the Camry empathized with Mazaa, it felt the

closest thing it could describe as contentment, until Mazaa was deported for overstaying his visa.

Its last owner was Kelly, a petite teenager who likes cranking up the radio to cheesy romance songs and raunchy rap music. She was adequate compared to Edward and Mazaa. She radiated happiness, always bouncing inside the car to the tunes of the radio. The Camry never resented Kelly, though. It recognized her youthfulness and lack of fear for the world, almost admired it. Kelly was nothing more than a child, and the Camry was nothing more than a car, a vessel to be led and directed. Her biggest flaw was her lack of attention span, her need to always check her phone. One day, while texting, Kelly filled the car with the wrong type of gas, and the car had never come as close to knowing what gagging felt like until that day. Kelly was a mediocre driver, swerving around and screaming whenever she hydroplaned in the rain until she gained control again. But this time was different; the truck that was approaching left her no option but to swerve off the road. Off the cliff. By the time she hit the water, the fear and panic caused her to pass out. The car was the only thing left conscious of the moment. But it was just a car, and with the driver unable to move, it could only sit in silence. And wait.

The Monstrous Fate of Mr. Soot

Kaitlyn Gretencord

Robert L. Soot, forty-one years old. Five feet and eleven inches tall. One hundred sixty pounds. Caucasian. Hazel eyes. Thinning chestnut hair. The patient looks like anybody. He unassuming, unenchanted. I doubt even a plastic surgeon could remember his face. But here we are, the hospital staff, drawing straws on who's to speak with him. Of course, I've drawn the short one. It's less about fear and more about annoyance with Mr. Soot. You see, he's been rhyming since the EMT guys found him behind the Upper Darby liquor store. He rhymes with himself. He rhymes with others. He's like Seuss. Or Gilbert. Or Sondheim. Or Lehrer. Only, there is no amusement in his scheme.

I enter the room. Mr. Soot is sitting at the desk.

"Hello, Mr. Soot," I say. "I'm Dr. Kaye."

"Is the game afoot?" he replies. "Am I okay?"

It has begun. I'm already impatient. "I'm going to ask you some questions, is that alright?"

"I'll just consider this a jam session. Don't be too uptight."

"Why do you feel you need to rhyme?"

"Why do I keep time with the chime of my lines?"

"Take this seriously."

"I am. Vigorously. Furiously."

"You said there were several monsters in your house?" I ask him.

"I am dreading the slaughter of myself, the louse. I am a man, but I am a mouse. I want to get out; it is in this way I resemble the crowd."

"And what did you do about it?"

"Id and ego surrounds it. There's a method to confound it. Here's what I do: when I think, rhyme. You're a sleuth, you get the stink of the slime."

"I don't understand."

"That's what I can't stand. Listen, the rhymes are monster repellent. They're the only way I can conquer the zealots. Okay doctor? You're the despot. I'll bring you through the day if you are so desperate."

I pull out a pad to take notes as he starts his monologue, but I quickly give up once he begins.

"We start in the morning, where I share my bed with the first. It dares to shed off the worst. It pairs my dread with its curse. I should tear off, but instead I reverse. *Voltaire is dead in a hearse in the flair that is said to be terse* - that's what it whispers, reminding me of all the gone and goodbye'd. It knows my heroes are pioneers of language. When reminded they're gone, I start crying tears to my disadvantage."

"It just reminds you of death?" I ask him.

"It makes me feel so bereft. It's the monster of stillness. Shrillness."

"Go on."

"I will, and I won't con. It's too snide to try and hide its

laziness—craziness; that’s what it does to me. It has these careless peculiarities, like it doesn’t replace the toilet roll. I suppose to toil is its role. I cajole it and console it when it sniffs loudly instead of blowing its nose. It’s got these long arms around me. They confound me. Astound me. Pushing me ever downwards and back into the mattress, it calls me a coward and says I lack prowess. But I use my words and I get up. I’m like a bird when I use a good couplet.”

I think I’m understanding him. “So when you rhyme, the monsters leave you alone?” I ask.

“It’s a method so fine, the monsters seethe in their own zone.”

“So this is a compulsive habit, Mr. Soot?”

“Let’s call it my version of rubbing a rabbit’s foot.”

“Did you forget about your trick the day of the crime?”

“Did I slip instead of rhyme? You’re talking about the murder. I know that’s why I’m here. But nothing could be further from the truth of my peers. That day there was another monster dwelling in my closet. The sordid imposter tells me to pause it. Claws? No, it has suction cups aplenty. Their function is to suck the applause from the ones who sent me. So I did what it told me, I packed my gun. You’ll think it was bold of me to give slack to my fun.”

“Didn’t you rhyme so it’d leave the room?”

“I did, but this time it gave me an idea to cure my gloom.”

“And you listened?”

"I wanted to feel less small, to be honest. So I took the gun and put it in my pocket."

"But the monsters are only in your house. You should've left unblocked and unstalked."

"Sure, but I'd forgotten that I left the door unlocked."

"How do you feel about the events of that day?"

"I knew this would be a topic from which you wouldn't stray. I don't feel bad, not even sad. No one died. My robbing of a liquor store beforehand was the only crime. I wanted bourbon but had no money. The cashier wore a turban and called me "sonny." It was over with no trouble. Little did I know, this was the start of my crumble. You see, I wasn't telling the truth when I called it murder. It was only the truth for me to go no further. You see, it was the monster that shot me. I didn't shoot myself. I forgot to rhyme and it caught me. It was aloof like I was in a padded cell."

"You forgot the trick?"

"It was an onslaught of panic. It gave me a word I couldn't rhyme. I felt in that moment that I was about to die."

"You claim it was a monster that shot you in the stomach?"

"And the noise sounded off like a trumpet."

"Tell me about this monster."

"In its eyes I saw my own slaughter. It clung to the walls of my car in sticky, green clumps, dripping to the floor finicky obscene lumps. It has fifty eyes, watching in tandem. It has nifty spies, debauchery with a phantom. I am the phantom;

I am the ghost. I can't avoid its gaze; it knows I'm just a
milquetoast. With its mind it takes my gun from my pocket.
It shoots at me; my death is its profit."

"And now you're here."

"That much is clear."

"And next you're off to the asylum."

"I'm a fried alum of such a horizon."

"Do you still see monsters assigned to you?"

"There's a big one behind you."

Matter

Bob Sheehan

“Energy can neither be created nor destroyed, son of a bitch,” he muttered to himself. He was breathing shallowly, teeth clenched, on the bus now stalled in traffic with rain tearing the window against which he, John Traverse, pressed his head, willing the bus to move to get to his first drink at home. “I always thought it was ‘matter,’ but it’s ‘energy,’” his voice low enough beneath the rumble of the bus and the crowding traffic. Though he, as matter, *was* disappearing from work, or being disappeared from work. Downsizing, they called it! Fucking being made to disappear. That taste in his mouth for drink and the temporary pleasure of no place to be in the morning. He pushed his fear for future mornings away.

His large, fleshy body overflowed to the wet, empty seat beside him, which he hoped would remain empty. No job and a god-damned cheating wife, soon to be ex-wife, who’d thrown him out of *his* house! His stomach billowed acid, fists clenched. His wife’s image knifing his thoughts. The bus shook his body as it stuttered and moved to street-side.

A woman, he thought it was a woman, who had to be well under five-feet tall caught his eye. As a tall and wide man, six-foot-five unless his god-damned weight was starting to compress his vertebra—his wife called him disgusting!—he was used to looking down on people. He turned his head to stop looking at the short woman, but still she sat next to him. “Well, I’m not moving my butt,” he thought. The bus started and he bounced in his fleshy sea. The bus engine errpping like it had stomach problems too, sending out the sad sounds of its releasing brakes.

The woman was bounced against him as the bus pulled haltingly into traffic. “Sorry,” she said. “The seats are so jammed together,” she bemoaned.

He looked at her and—she’s barely over four feet!—threw out some sentences he hoped would not invite further conversation.

“No problem,” he replied. “The key is the spacing between the seats. They just don’t plan properly.” He heard her quick intake of breath and then—what?—what sounded like crying. Why? What did he say? He turned slightly; her eyes were tearing.

In response, she spouted, “Oh, yes, oh my yes, you’re so right. You’re so right,” she said with a disconcerting intensity. “You’re so right,” she repeated as though she could not stop herself, her intensity unabated.

The bus pulled over squeaking and tilting for another pickup at the curb. She suddenly burst, “I’m so sorry” then leapt to her feet and pushed through the oncoming passengers, running off the bus. She left his sight immediately as she stepped down, then he picked her up again still running—why was she running?—away from the bus. A spike of light caught his eye, which surprised him since there was no sun. It was a key, an unusual key, on the seat she had vacated. It was unusual looking, like one of those old skeleton keys, but with an oddly extended, tapering, crenulated end. And it seemed to glow. He picked it up, surprised at its heat and weight.

He got to his door, dripping from the rain and his—god dammit—forgotten umbrella sitting right inside the door! He reached for his key and came up with the short woman’s museum piece. He laughed and said, “What the hell?” poking the odd piece into his lock, turning it. The door opened. “What?!” He pulled the key and walked in frowning, then quickly walked back out, pulling the door to lock it and trying the key again. The door opened again. He entered his cramped, silent apartment, reflexively ducking his head to

avoid banging it against the low doorway of the old building, staring at the key.

It usually started by his second drink. The young asshole next door assaulting the walls with his banging music. The walls thrumming with the base. Traverse wanted to kill him. He heard his shit-head neighbor's door open and slam shut, probably heading out for cigarettes at the bodega next door, leaving his music slamming. He downed a third drink in anger and had a sudden thought. He knew he didn't have much time. He pulled the key—warmer, heavier. It worked. He laughed with a drunken looseness, went to his neighbor's CD player, lifting it and crashing it to the floor. The music stopped. He suddenly realized where he was, in a strange apartment, and left quickly, swaying, heart hammering with fear and pleasure.

He used the key again in his own door. It was only when he got inside, breathing heavily, smiling broadly, that he realized he hadn't had to duck his head entering. He got a third drink and stood in the low doorway of his bathroom. He didn't have to measure. His head barely brushed the top. He was shorter by inches. "What the hell," he muttered. Then he heard, "What the fuck!" from nextdoor and started laughing.

Three a.m. Alone in his favorite—and closed—bar. He grinned. The key emanated heat in his pocket. He knew he was shorter still, losing even more height this time. It seemed with each successive use you lost greater height. He pleurably recalled the five-minute angry rant of his neighbor. Nothing was sweeter than revenge. He sipped the—free—numbing whiskey and...thought of his wife. She had changed the locks. He spat whiskey laughing.

In the dark, in their—she thought *her*—house, he sat in a mingling of shadows in the dark corner of their living room.

He had entered silently—he was well under six feet tall now—and moved silently, opened drawers silently. He sat, holding the premium-quality knives she had insisted on buying. Only the best! Well they *were* hers. And he couldn't stop his drunken laugh.

Then he waited, still as just another shadow.

Character Building

Jane GaNun

“Jeez...yeah, it’s actually kinda sad.” Kiera extends out of her seat, leaning over the wooden desk in front of her, challenging its very will and reserve. Kiera doesn’t care though—she’s determined for me to look back at her, bug my eyes out, and excitedly demand, “OMG, what??”

She taps the back of my shoulder, “Hey.”

Let’s get this over with. “What’s up,” I respond. I feel like I’m putting a rose between my teeth, announcing that the tango is about to begin.

“Have you heard?” She speaks through a giddy and sinister smile, the words escaping her Invisalign retainer. She raises her eyebrows and shoots her pupils in the direction of our teacher, letting me know that whatever I haven’t heard yet is probably about that woman.

“Dude someone found her... *blog*.” As she uttered those words, I swear time slowed down. The world stopped except for a few in-the-know peers behind me who heard and snickered.

Okay, maybe this is delicious gossip.

“No, are you serious?” I’m covering my bases. No one wants to be the gullible kid. Doing a double-check ensures that you won’t get hurt upon finding out that simple eighth-grade pleasures like this are, in fact, to be too good to be true.

“Yeah... and it’s bad...” Kiera divulges this with the same excitement one would expect from a semi-substantial lottery win. Let’s say about two hundred dollars. I don’t blame her.

“Dude... she sings.”

Miss Forbes is a well-meaning plump woman in her early-thirties with chunky blonde highlights, who might as well be dead. A quick glance over the classroom reveals about thirty seated, chittering and cackling hyenas, ready for the kill. Everyone knows.

“And... writes posts about her love life!”

Ah this poor woman! As if following an exposure to tear gas, I’m forced to shield my face for a moment, covering it with my hands. I want to feel bad, but she did this to herself.

“Oh my *God*, let me see!” in hushes I exclaim, allowing Kiera to hold and dip me backwards, continuing our routine. It really is just more fun to be in on the mob mentality.

She pulls out her laptop, searches, and then reveals her gold. A treasure-trove of video clips, music, and posts all hosted on lifewithsarah.com. I guess her name is Sarah then.

Sarah has been busy lately. She’s been relaying information to her fourteen followers regarding her recent online dates, weight-loss struggles, attempts at song covers, shopping hauls, makeup routines, and what a day in her life looks like. What a nightmare. I could not imagine anything worse, and I once walked around school for three hours, oblivious to a growing period stain that marked my new pair of denim shorts. People will probably talk about this like they talked about that. I hope she can take the character building!

Keira shuts her laptop and looks to Sarah Forbes, who stands at the board trying to explain that “You just don’t use the *vosotros* tense.”

“Does she know everyone found it?” I ask, and Kiera begins to smirk. She pauses for a moment, languishing in my desire

to know. When she finally feels as though she has crafted a dramatic moment she begins. “No,” she says, “But she will! Max Iandoli printed out like twenty copies of that one post where she talks about how she’s a “curvy woman” and “deserves love.” He’s gonna get Jason and them to put them up all around the school!”

Every part of me wants to watch this unfold but it feels almost too cruel to enjoy. She’s too easy of a target. “Oh my *God!* When is he doing it?” I can’t tell if I am actually excited about the prospect of Max’s and Jason’s terrorist tactics or just pretending to be.

“Apparently next period,” Kiera says with a twinkle in her eye.

I look back at Sarah Forbes, her ugly 2008 knee-high brown boots, and faux-fashion American Eagle cardigan, and I think I just feel bad. I turn back to Kiera and say, “Wait can you show me that video of her singing Firework?”



Max Iandoli and Jason and the rest of the eighth-grade sociopaths released their flyers like a swarm of bees. Their buzzing and stinging did not take long to reach Miss Forbes. Kiera told me that Jenna Shwartz told her that she saw Miss Forbes running out of the building crying.

“Yeah, I don’t blame her, I would probably do the same thing,” I admitted to Kiera, missing a step. But for the first time, her eighth-grade undeveloped lizard brain malfunctioned, and she was able to see some humanity in her chubby teacher. She opened her mouth and was silent before speaking.

“Jeez...yeah, it’s actually kinda sad.”

This is How You Grow Your Garden

Julia Lowndes

When she leaves, you consider cutting down the oak tree. You dig an axe out of the shed, hold its thick, wooden handle until it accepts the warmth from your hand. You imagine the stump it would leave behind. Not even a foot thick. Not even big enough to be a good sitting stump. A stump should have conviction. It should have memories of children playing and dogs napping and lovers' carvings. But the oak tree stands before you, small and hopeful. The axe is heavy in your hand, so you put it back in the shed and pour a glass of bourbon. She always wanted a yard with a gnarled old oak tree.

You breathe and you drink and you wake up for work. There are no personal days for this kind of loss. Time moves like it did before, but space feels wider now. You drive home from work, wondering what you're waiting for. Rush hour is nothing but a reminder of what you don't have—no one waiting at home, no person to feed and to feed you. Maybe there is nothing in this town but highways and open sky. Maybe the dry pavement will open up and swallow you. Or maybe she will come home and see the oak in the yard, small and hopeful. Don't tell her about the axe, the bourbon. Don't be angry. The house will smell like sandalwood again and you will forget how big your bed feels. But she doesn't come home.

As winter takes the leaves from the oak tree, find the axe in the shed again. Cut your hand on a rusted nail while you dig through forgotten things. Be angry. Look at the tree and taste bitterness in your blood. With its spindly, frozen limbs, the oak is more pitiful than ever. Who could love a tree like this? You decide she must have been crazy. The axe hits the trunk with a dull thud. Nothing. She was so beautiful the day she brought the seedling home, her hair tied back and her skin smelling of soil. She told you about the birds who would

make a home here and feed their young off the caterpillars that hung from its branches. She bought binoculars and a subscription to *BirdWatching* magazine. She loved it like a child: checked on it in the morning, sprayed fertilizer on its fresh soil. You had tried to understand. She had never loved anything this much since before the third miscarriage. You showed excitement when, the next spring, its trunk had hardened. It was standing in its own. It was decorated with leaves. Beautiful. But the next spring brought the fourth miscarriage, and not even the oak could keep her with you. You drop the axe to the ground. You've never chopped anything a day in your life. A blanket of snow covers the axe, and the oak keeps growing.

You breathe and you drink and you wake up for work. When you sleep, you let your body take over the whole bed. You stop leaving the porch light on and the door unlocked. Do it. She has a key anyway. The nights come and go without warning, and in the morning there are no birds to wake you. You want to call her and tell her that she had been wrong. There are no families of birds living in her tree. It is barren. Lonely. But you're not sure if your voice works anymore. When's the last time you heard it? Your mouth moves, and sound must come out. You blink your eyes to make sure those are working too. Maybe you should have fallen in love with someone else in college, spared yourself the pain of a woman who would leave you with nothing but half of a two-year subscription to *BirdWatching* magazine.

You breathe and you eat and you stretch in the morning. Your toes slowly regain feeling from a long, cold winter. Hot showers help shake life back into your limbs. You start speaking just to hear your own voice. Go to Best Buy just to be surrounded by people. Stand beside a stranger and watch a TV play the same demo scenes on repeat. A European countryside so crisp you can almost feel the breeze on your skin.

Beautiful. Go home. Cobwebs cover the corners of the house that used to belong to her—her side of the closet, her seat at the kitchen table. You could sweep them up, fill the holes they leave behind with your own things. Not yet. Instead, you fill your trunk with black-eyed Susans and bee balms and day lilies. You spend days digging holes around the oak and planting seedlings in the cool earth. Over the seasons, you will watch your flowers grow. The insects will come and then the birds. Don't think about her coming home. You feed yourself now. You are home now. When the last copy of *BirdWatching* magazine arrives in the mailbox, put it in the drawer with the others. Renew the subscription for two more years.

Bar Fight

Susan Schatz

Saturday evening at the Marina tavern, the local—actually, only—watering hole in our small town on the river, and I lingered behind the bar, casually swishing a rag around in a lazy effort to banish the funky beer aroma that rose up and hung over the whole place. The usual crowd began to wander in and perch themselves on the same stools they occupy every weekend, in anticipation of getting drunk and calculating their chances of getting lucky. Not much changed from week to week around here. Glancing over at my barback, Jake, who was changing out the kegs on the other side of the bar, I caught a wink of his gorgeous baby blues as he smiled at me. That made me glad I had taken the time to pull my long hair up in a messy bun and throw some makeup on my face before I came to work. He always appreciated when I made an effort with my appearance, though he liked to tease me for being too skinny. Jake was also my boyfriend.

In a haze of heavy reeking perfume, Audie, the waitress, finally made an entrance as the band tuned up on the stage across the dance floor. Her skintight jeans always made the men yearn and the women jealous. I admit, with her long dark hair and pale skin, she was gorgeous. She was a no-nonsense waitress, but drama seemed to follow her like a shadow. Audie was also my sister.

Beer began to flow while the country music outfit on the stage swung into its first set and the usual suspects around the bar loosened up in anticipation of their weekly, boozy shenanigans. Audie sashayed among the tables around the dance floor, taking drink orders from couples and groups alike and offering food menus. It was inspiring to watch her work the crowd to maximize her tips. Soon the place was rocking and shaking. Yeah, just another Saturday night in paradise.

It was then that Sherry breezed through the door with her

daughter Bethany. A former local legend who relocated south a few years back, Sherry was known as “The Hurricane,” because she blew into town, stirred up trouble, then blew back out again. She always had a wild, blowsy look about her, and a voice that rumbled like thunder. I was never happy to see her. Her daughter Bethany was well known as a hothead who could ignite at the slightest offense, and the waves of her anger often smacked around town catching unsuspecting victims in her undertow. Anytime she got pissed off at someone, and that was often, she would threaten, “I’m gonna pop her head off.” Sometimes she followed through.

To make matters even worse, the trouble-making mother-daughter duo took up flirting with every male clustered at the bar; the same ones Audie considered her own personal property. To make matters even worse, Audie had been sipping her favorite Jack Daniels all evening. More often than not, Jake and I could keep her under control, but this was an explosion waiting to happen. I glanced at Jake; he shrugged. So much for our hope of a peaceful Saturday night.

Things seemed to be going along fine; everyone seemed relaxed and happy, dancers twirling and two-stepping along to the beat of the music. But as I surveyed the room, I noticed that Audie was wedged between Sherry and Bethany, and she was smoking a cigarette! Damn, she can’t smoke in here! There was a new no-indoor-smoking ordinance just passed by our town council, many of whom were here tonight. I moseyed over and informed her to take her smoke outside, but she just smirked at me and flipped her hair. She specialized in driving me crazy sometimes. Bethany caught that expression, and it was enough to set her off.

“Didn’t she tell you to take that outside? What the hell is wrong with you?” Bethany barked. Audie slid around Bethany, and I watched as she deliberately nudged past and

caused the drink in Beth's hand to slosh over. Well, that was all it took. Bethany came up swinging and fists were flying! Sherry joined the fray, and the three scuffled past the crowded dance floor and out into the parking lot. What a commotion! I heard screams, and I could almost feel the stinging of the slaps and punches they rained down on each other. I grabbed the taser we kept under the bar for just such situations and caught up with Jake as he ran out the door. Behind me, I heard several of our less inebriated patrons dial 911 to report the fight while they jockeyed to beat each other through the door in order to not miss the action. In the parking lot, Sherry was getting the worst of it. I tossed the taser at Jake and yelled, "Tase her!" Several of our sketchier clientele headed for places unknown when police sirens began to wail in the distance.

And, in a deadpan voice, Jake asked, "Who do you want me to tase, your mother or your sisters?"

I shook my head in disgust. Like I said, just another run-of-the-mill Saturday night in this too small town.

The Changeling

Version 1 Illustration by Krista Webster



Contributors

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Christopher Johnson graduated in May 2020 with a Chemical Engineering major and English minor. He is pursuing a doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania in Chemical Engineering; he plans to express the stories of scientific literature. He also plays way too much Animal Crossing and D&D.

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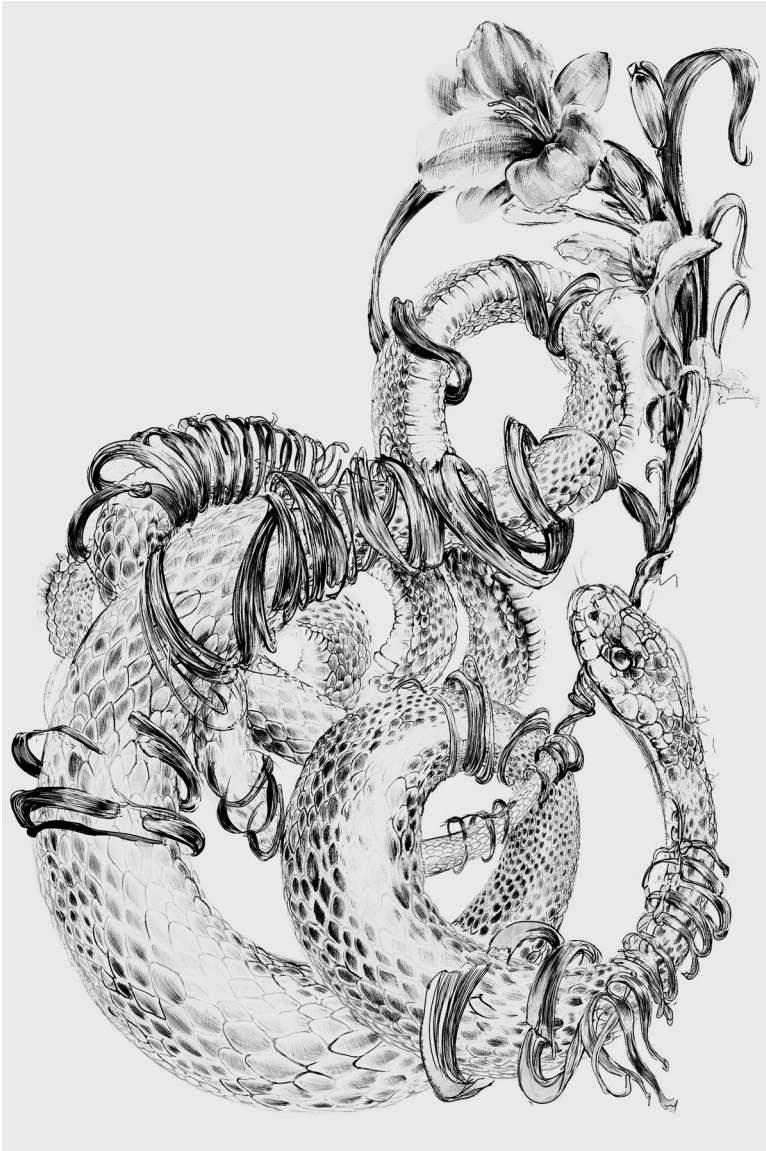
Krista Webster is a recently graduated Visual Communications major. She has a great love for music and writing and integrates ideas/fragments of these media into her artwork. Her secondary loves include pistachio gelato, Bojack Horseman, and cats.

Zihan Wu is a junior Computer Science major with minors in Art and Integrated Design. She loves to doodle all over her notes and enjoys jotting down silly ideas to turn into the occasional poem.

Joshua Yawn studied Economics and English at the University of Delaware after growing up in Sussex County. He tries to fear God and admires men like Marcus Aurelius, Socrates, Desmond Doss, and Steve Rogers.

The Changeling

Version 2 Illustration by Krista Webster



Production Notes

The text of *Caesura* features the font family ITC Stone Serif, which was developed in 1987 by Sumner Stone during his tenure as director of typography at Adobe Systems.

The font Chalet Comprimé Los Angeles, one of ten varieties of the Chalet Comprimé family created by Delaware-based type foundry House Industries, was used for *Caesura* 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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