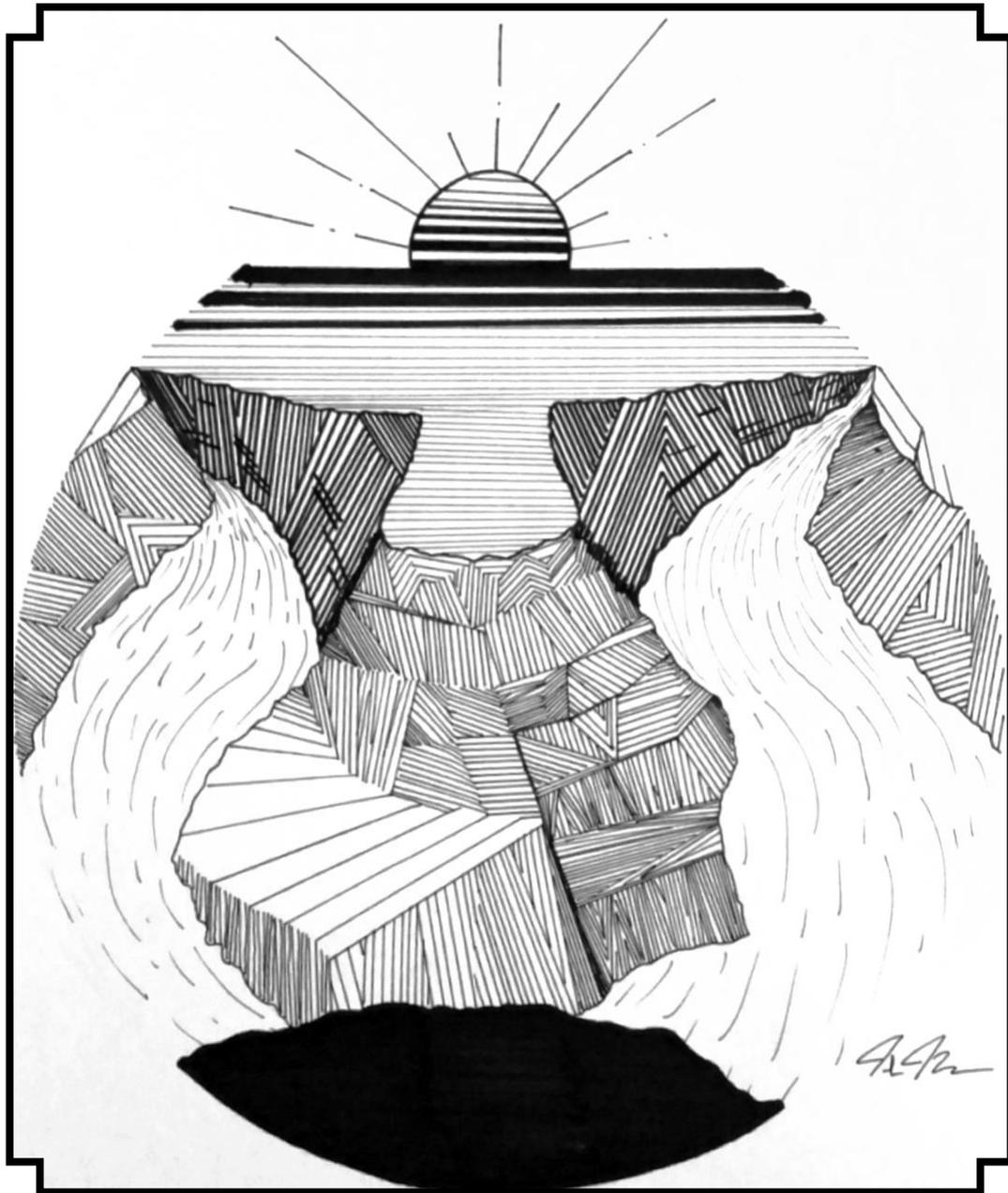


Spring 2019



Morpheus Literary  
Magazine

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# *Morpheus Staff*

**Kasandra Christner**, Editor-in-Chief

**Elyssa Williams**, Managing and Layout Editor

**Carly Evans**, Media Representative and Prose Editor

**Ivy Connolly**, Art Editor

**Fletcher Grey**, Poetry Editor

**Katharina Oehmichen**, First Reader

**Aedan Ginty**, First Reader

**Lucy Biederman**, Advisor



Front row, left to right: Fletcher Grey, Carly Evans, Kasandra Christner

Back row, left to right: Katharina Oehmichen, Elyssa Williams, Ivy Connolly, Aedan Ginty

Unpictured: Advisor Lucy Biederman

## **Contact Us:**

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Twitter: @HUMorpheus

## *Editor's Note*

Dear Reader,

For our spring 2019 issue, our staff took great care to select and publish submissions that capture the voice of our campus; with this goal in mind, you will find a variety of short stories and poetry that discuss multiple topics.

Following this note, you will also find the biography and an interview with Ohio's poet laureate Dave Lucas, who our advisor Lucy Biederman was able to bring to campus through the Jean Warren Gekler Writer's Series. Additionally, you will find visual art and photography submitted by Heidelberg's incredibly talented students.

Finally, we wanted to extend a thank you to our new and old faculty advisors. Our new advisor, Dr. Lucy Biederman, has encouraged us to make this publication the best it can be. Our past faculty advisor, Dr. David Kimmel, who is retiring this year, has devoted many years to this publication and his dedication to promoting reading and creative writing on campus has shaped this publication into what it is today. Thank you both so much for your help facilitating our vision for this magazine.

Please enjoy this issue! It has been a pleasure for Morpheus's staff to put it together to celebrate the creativity of the Heidelberg community.

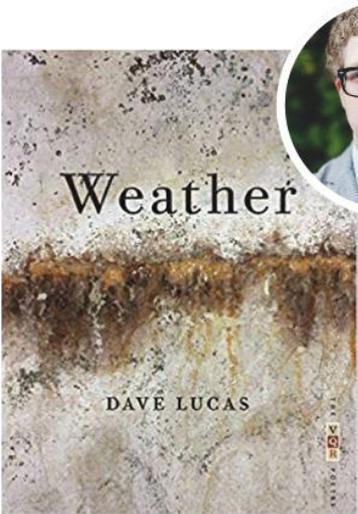
Sincerely,  
Kasandra Christner  
Editor-in-chief

## *Special Thanks!*

We give special thanks to the following for their support and contributions to this issue:

Professor Emeritus Dr. Bill Reyer for judging our poetry competition,  
Caleb Hess and Julie Hild for acting as first readers for the competition,  
Jakob Kress for his wonderful art submissions, one of which is featured as our cover, and  
Haley Wulff for editing our covers.

JEAN WARREN GEKLER  
**Writer's Series**  
 HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY



Weather  
 DAVE LUCAS

Poet Laureate of the State of Ohio

**Dave Lucas**

Author of  
*Weather*  
 2012 Ohioana Book Award for Poetry

Dave Lucas was born and raised in Cleveland. He studied literature and poetry at John Carroll University (BA, 2002), the University of Virginia (MFA, 2004), and the University of Michigan (PhD, 2014). His first book of poems, *Weather* (VQR / Georgia, 2011), received the 2012 Ohioana Book Award for Poetry. Named by Rita Dove as one of thirteen “young poets to watch,” he has also received a Discovery/The Nation Prize and a Cleveland Arts Prize. In 2018, he was appointed the second Poet Laureate of the State of Ohio. A co-founder of Cleveland Book Week and Brews + Prose at Market Garden Brewery, he lives in Cleveland, where he teaches at Case Western Reserve University.

## Q & A with Dave:

How did literary magazines function in the building of your career?

*I've been sending poems to literary magazines since the days when you'd look for your own handwriting on the SASE and get excited to find out what sort of rejection you'd received. And I've worked on the other side of the transom too, with that wild good fortune of finding something in the "slush pile" that seems to change everything. Whatever this career is, I wouldn't have it--from my college journal until now--without literary magazines.*

If you could give advice to aspiring poets at Heidelberg, what would you say?

*The only advice I believe to be true for every writer, no matter their genre, their background, or their goals for writing, is to read as omnivorously and ecstatically as possible.*



*Photo by Erin Brown*

## **Van Gogh's *Café Terrace at Night***

By Alexandra Chakov

First Place Poetry Winner

The sound of my boots  
on the cobblestones thrills me,  
much more than the man by my side.  
The stars in the sky  
shine brighter than his eyes,  
and the orange glow coming from the  
nearby restaurant doesn't help his plain features.  
People laugh and loudly talk  
from their tables,  
I wish to join them, but not with him.  
He will suck the joy out  
like he does with everything.  
For now I will just watch—  
Let the night unravel around me  
like a painting in progress.  
With that I am content.

**A Child's Inquiry**  
By Aedan Ginty  
Second Place Poetry Winner

Mama, mother  
Where did the eyes of the doll go?  
*Merry Eyes,*  
*What a surprise,*  
*Those cloudy eyes deny*  
*Men's frivolous shine.*

Mama, mother  
Where did Uncle Riley go?  
*Merry Man,*  
*Over the sand*  
*Of the Sudetenland*  
*Did Uncle Riley bury his hands.*

Mama, mother  
Where did the Sun go?  
*Evening star,*  
*It went too far.*  
*It went down towards the lake of the larks,*  
*A blip on the radar.*

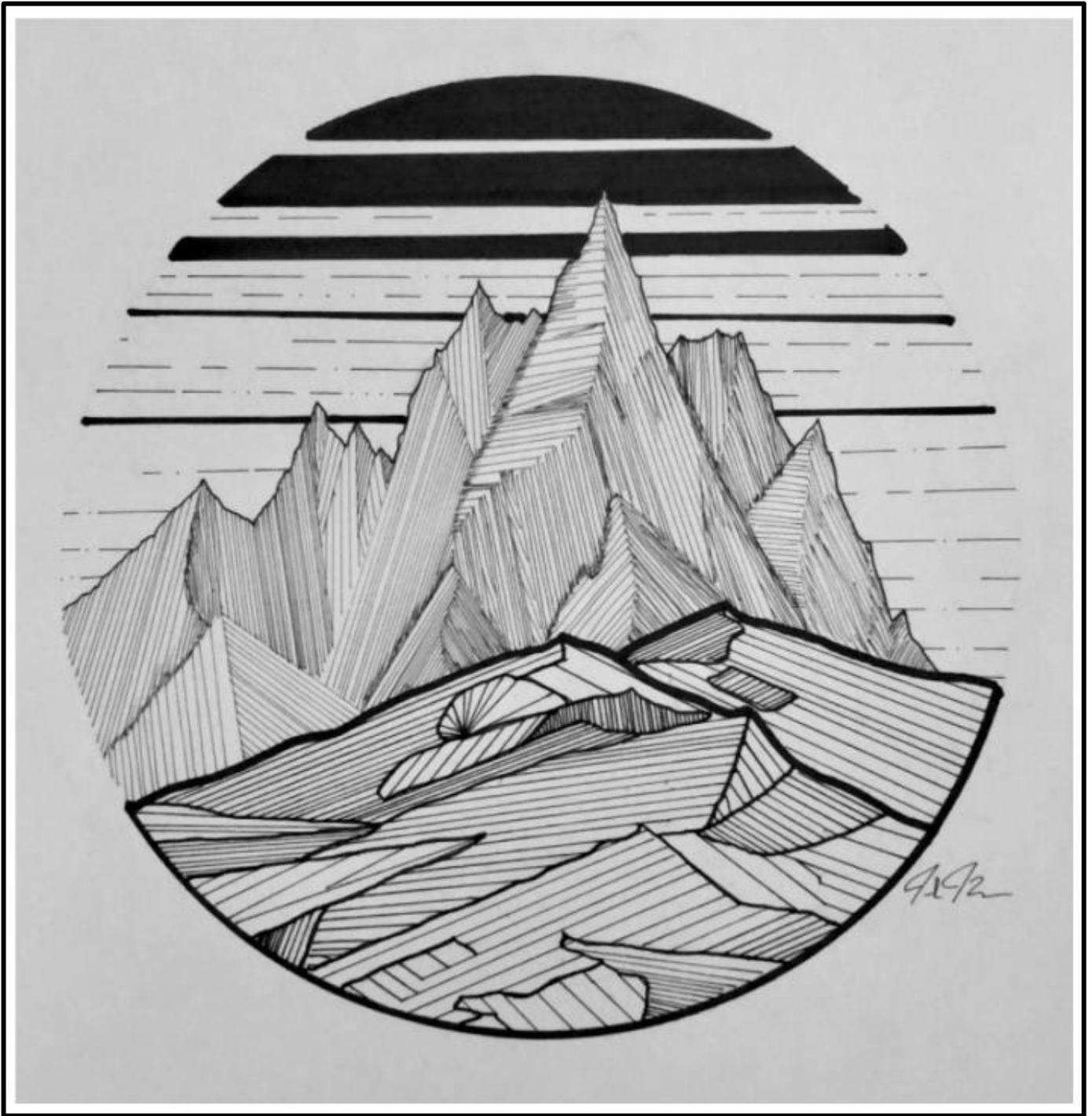
Mama, mother  
Why does my body ache so?  
*Hush, hush*  
*Please don't make it a fuss*  
*My words have become rust*  
*As the wind hollows around us.*

## capitalization and punctuation

By Regan Turner  
Third Place Poetry Winner

you made me feel dirty  
because once a month  
I bleed  
and youd pound your fist  
against your forehead  
and sigh in aggravation  
because you I understand  
and I was sorry  
that I was gross  
and bled  
I tried to make it stop  
but I I  
because I am a woman  
and women bleed  
once a month  
since forever  
for forever

but heres the thing  
you simple minded man  
I am not gross  
I am your worst nightmare  
do not condemn me  
because of your ignorance  
I will not fall victim to you  
understand this  
I will bleed for life  
with life  
without strife  
im sorry you arent comprehending  
human life  
but not sorry about what I am  
which is human  
woman  
PERIOD.



*Art by Jakob Kress*

# Standing in an Empty Field Screaming at the Milky Way

By Clarissa Jones

Honorable Mention

I would like to believe in an orderly universe.

I would *like* to believe in an orderly universe.

I would like to believe in Meant To Bes and Every Thing Happens For A Reasons.

I would like to take comfort in being governed by:

some higher power, or:

the movement of stars, or:

the ceaseless pull of the moon or:

the whole of nature itself or even:

some benevolent force deep in the dark matter of the universe that

sets a marble rolling to start off a Rube Goldberg chain reaction to subtly manipulate events to get us to this moment.

But:

there are these proteins in brains

(prions, if names bring power)

that

sometimes, if they fold wrong

and then, folded wrong

bump into other proteins in the brain and fold them the same, wrong way

and if this happens to you, usually:

first: you start seeing things and then:

you cannot control your movements and then:

within six months

you are dead.

And sometimes this happens for a reason

sometimes the reason is genetics and

sometimes the reason is tainted meat but

most of the time

most of the time

most of the time

it is

and this is the proper scientific terminology:

spontaneous;

meaning,

of course,  
that it happens for no reason at all.

And it is not as if I look at each and every horror at roam in the world  
and take it as proof that we have been set adrift alone.  
I can appreciate the role wildfires play  
in reseeding the land they ravage.  
I have seen the pictures of the land around Mount Saint Helens  
a near 30 years after the pyroclastic flow  
green and full of life and thriving thriving thriving .

I too have wondered at the unique species of fungus growing on the walls near the  
melted Chernobyl reactor,  
at the conditions life can bend itself to out of necessity.  
I can look at these and think  
okay  
okay  
maybe there is a certain something something something  
out there looking out for us,  
or if not for us  
then for the fungus.

I can even turn a sympathetic eye  
to those parasites that hijack the tiny musical minds of the crickets  
to make themselves drown themselves in the nearest spot of water  
so the parasites may reproduce  
and so that fish may eat the crickets.  
Grisly? Yes.  
Uncomfortable? Of course.  
But I can see the sense in it  
a structure,  
a pattern,  
the unsentimental logic of a food chain.

What logic does a prion have?  
When a prion is not spontaneous,  
sometimes,  
when it is inheritable  
when it is in your blood your bones your dna  
it rots your brain in a different way.

First, you lose the inability to sleep in short bursts, to nap.  
Then, you lost the ability to sleep deeply.  
Then, you lose your dreams.  
And then, after this tiny multiplied mistake of a protein has stolen your dreams  
you lose the ability to sleep at all.  
You'd think you'd die at that point  
but it doesn't let you.  
You hold on  
for another nine months or so  
in an unresponsive  
but still sleepless  
state.

Fatal familial insomnia  
is found in only 40 families  
(that we know of)  
in the world.

And why?  
Where is the logic there?  
Where is the grand invisible hand of the universe  
playing marbles hiding far back in the background radiation of the big bang  
misfolding the proteins and why?

Accidents happen I know  
accidents happen and no one can stop them  
accidents happen and all we can do is watch.  
But if the hand were there  
if the universe were a grand mobile on invisible strings tugged  
this way and that by invisible persons unknown  
then what is the point of the prions?

So as much as I would like to  
as much as I want to  
and I do want  
want deeply to  
to believe in an orderly universe  
despite all the horrors I can see  
and despite of all of the beauty of the shining diamond stars above me

and the beauty of the chorus of many winged voices in the woods and the tall  
grasses around me.

I cannot.

I cannot see order in those tiniest of mistakes

that a governing hand

a governing mind

a loving voice above the clouds

would surely have corrected

to forestall pointless spontaneous suffering.

As much as I would like to,

as much as I want to.

## **Soft**

By Jessie Hoehn  
Honorable Mention

feelings  
touch conveyed  
back to then

soft

soft

she was soft  
soft and sweet  
and I loved her  
but that's all  
I get

**Special**  
**Daily Police Bulletin**

By Ivy Connolly

That poor, beautiful

**Cow**

Roaming the fields with the wrong fella-

Steve Hodel

L / ifeless smile

A

U

G / ashes

H

T / hree inches

E

R / ight. Down. The. Middle.

**Twenty-Two**

FINGERNAILS CHEWED TOO QUICK

*Very Attractive*

**Bad**

**teeth**

**Lower**

Most say,

He loved her—

Enough to kill her.

And the love, whatever it was, an infection.

*The Cafeteria Mystery Meat*



*Photo by Erin Brown*

By Jessie Hoehn

## Blue

Her blue gaze  
rested upon the world,  
engulfed in the sorrow  
of times past. Seeing  
what the present was  
forbidden from being in  
its melancholic tone of  
sapphire and jade. It  
glittered as a bright  
stone does in water,  
though its farce was  
clear to anyone with  
knowledge enough to  
See past the haze  
of grandeur. She sought  
to change its tone, and  
by extent the character  
of her world, but failed.  
For she was but one  
against a rising tide  
of indifference.

## Time

Time, the flowing of which  
I understand not. But in  
dreams I perceive a thought  
of understanding that fades  
as I awaken to the world.  
In these dreams, I live  
other lives estranged from  
reality. It seems time  
there is fluid. Weeks span  
hours, days are but a thought  
to the mind. A child exists there,  
in time. She watches the clock  
spin by, putting her finger  
on the dial, as her whim  
accords. A game it seems,  
but there is no structure to  
her touch. She lives madness,  
but sees none.

By Clarissa Jones

## **And Are the Mysteries of the Universe for Your Consumption?**

On the afternoon the announcements were made  
we packed our big bag and umbrella,  
our ragged old picnic blanket and the picnic that it belonged to,  
and went down to the beach to watch the end of the world.

There was a certain lack of consensus on what exactly we were supposed to be  
watching.

The seas were going to boil!

No, they were going to turn to blood!

Ridiculous, all the fish were going to die, and everything else soon after.

No, of course not, it is only that one minute there will be water; and the next  
minute none.

What are you talking about, we are here to watch a comet fall into the sea,  
we are here to drown ourselves in the tsunami that follows.

And on and on and on,

as people shared sandwiches and binoculars, towels and buckets  
(but not sunscreen)

debating the circumstance of our impending extinction.

I threw the crusts of my bread to one of the seagulls impatiently waiting  
to see if it could fool any of us into thinking it was starving and take pity.

It looked smug,

as if it knew something we did not, could not, see,

but then,

seagulls always do.

They are not the noblest of birds, and we not the noblest of humans,  
those of us making a celebration of our last day.

Since not one of us knew what we were waiting for;  
sometimes a shout rang over the beach

This is it!!!

But it wasn't, it was a log in the water.

This is it!!!  
But it wasn't, it was an oddly shaped cloud.  
This is *it*!!!!  
But it wasn't.  
It was just another seagull,  
flying away with a stolen treasure from some other pilgrim's picnic.

What we wanted was a spectacle;  
what we wanted was a monster we could not fight,  
a catastrophe for which we were not to blame,  
a storm we could not weather.  
What we wanted was a final moment of glorious suffering  
to make sense of all the moments of mundane suffering that came before.  
We wanted our catharsis on a scale apocalyptic.

In the end, there was no screaming,  
was no chaos,  
was no panic.

Yes, the sun dimmed, and then bathed us in a strange, red light.  
Yes, something wild and huge spread its wings across the sky and hid in the  
shadows on the sun.  
Yes, ancient, innumerable, incomprehensible hordes of something rose from and  
marched out of the sea.

But it wasn't a spectacle.  
It wasn't a show.  
The martyrdom we were chasing was never granted.  
We were ignored,  
left utterly alone.  
We could not even begin to understand what dramas that played out before us,  
all there was to do was stand in silence on shore.

The end of the world failed to take into account anyone was watching at all.  
The apocalypse held a complete disinterest in us:  
its audience.  
In fact it did not notice,  
nor care,  
that we had come to witness and to welcome it.

And then when the light came back full force,  
without a warning  
stinging our eyes,  
still no one made a sound.  
If we spoke,  
we knew,  
we would have to acknowledge our unimportance,  
we would have to admit that as witnesses,  
we were not needed,  
were not necessary,  
that our presence had no bearing on turning of the world.

So on the evening after the end of the world,  
as a garish new sun sank slowly into a sea,  
that did not boil,  
nor turn to blood,  
we the spectators packed our bags and umbrellas,  
our ragged old picnic blankets and the salvageable remnants of our picnics,  
to trek back to the parking lot  
as the seagulls began their battles over our forgotten scraps  
as we began our journey in the world remade  
towards home,  
to do the same.

## What's in Motion Stays in Motion

The Woman perches  
on the edge of the tiled counter  
as her nails slide under  
yet another of the shiny green scales emerging from her shoulder,  
prying it slowly but not delicately  
out of the surrounding scarred skin;  
and flicks it into the small (yet growing growing growing)  
pile of its sisters at the bottom of the sink.

She closes her eyes  
to the harsh fluorescent lights,  
her hand stretching across her shoulder and then her back,  
searching for another emerald imperfection in her skin;  
by touch, only,  
not looking never looking:  
if she looks, she makes it Real.

Her fingers dance across her back.  
There? No, only a scar, from another time when she sat on the bathroom sink, eyes  
closed, sharp nails searching.  
There? No, only a wound not yet healed, dried blood still flaking off as her fingers  
rub the space that will become a scar.  
There? Maybe, wait, yes, another scale; an old one, big and hard and green as a  
beetle's wing;  
in a hard to reach spot; she reasons as to why she must have missed it the last time  
or the time before  
or the time before before before—

(They are not growing faster harder bigger  
she will not entertain the thought.)

This scale is more unwilling to part from the skin from which it sprouted,  
the harder her long undecorated nails poke and prod and try to find a gap between  
the scale and the bloody space beneath,  
the harder it stubbornly clings to the skin it has claimed for itself saying  
mine now mine now mine now—

And she wasn't going to—  
but who was there to lie to  
(only herself)  
she thinks as she grabs the metal tool she once heard was for pushing skin from  
your nails  
(and when has she ever done her nails, the scales would just ruin them, digging out  
the scales)  
from its place of honor on the counter  
and digs it into into into her skin  
and under under under the scale—

And it hurts and it hurts and the Woman bites her lip as she feels the hot, dark  
blood  
ooze out from under the scale  
as it finally finally  
lifts from her body,  
exhausted from its fight, letting go.

And this time  
(and she said wouldn't said she wouldn't  
it's gross and obsessive and what is the point—)  
instead of flicking it onto the pile  
she holds the glossy green scale  
up to the light  
as if it holds all the answers to all the questions she has ever, ever asked.

(and therein, of course, lies the problem:  
what if it does, what if it does, what if does.)

But this time the old scale sits silent between her fingers  
not mocking  
just silent  
and she flicks it into the sink to rest on top of the others,  
shaking off her shamed reverie.

She reaches back, to see if the spot's still bleeding  
(and of course it is, of course it is, of course of course of course—)  
The blood not so much flowing as oozing  
out, over her fingers;  
and she lifts her head

to look out the bathroom window  
where the little apple tree that is so pink and pretty in spring  
and so bare and lonely now in winter so long,  
hunches over in the dry wind.

She rests her head in her hand,  
forgetting the blood that stains her finger;  
the blood from the scale,  
smearing her cheek.

## **The Outer Banks, 2004**

By Kate Mundy

Little, bare feet  
running.

Fearless.

Not caring if the sand was too hot,  
or worried about boardwalk splinters.

“Don’t go too far into the ocean”,  
our parents always yelled.

A vast monster sparking our  
curiosity.

Would it swallow us  
whole?

Did we dare try to find out?

Life is not a beach;  
life is a treasure hunt.

Hand-drawn paper maps.  
Simple clues for our then  
simple minds.

Small treasure chests  
in shallow graves,

but it felt so real  
like a six foot hole.

A clan of miniature pirates.

If only we could be that little,

that naive, forever.

Dollar store prizes  
like gold to us.

Gum cigars we pretended to smoke  
that were always stale

like summers taste now.

Goonies never say die,  
until they hit their 20's.

Now they only say nine to five,  
and school,  
and debt,  
and "I'm too busy".

X no longer marks the spot;  
take me back to when it did.

## Nightline Streets

By Aedan Ginty

Spilling out of the bars,  
The rowdy men and women  
With words buzzing left and right,  
File out into the nightline streets,  
Even more words wavering over  
Light-headed skies.  
The auburn rays of streetlamps  
Glisten onto the knives  
Of the thugs and hookers  
On the intersection of  
Jefferson and East Madison Streets.  
Cars stuff themselves  
Onto small asphalt plains,  
Incoherent voices  
Yelling at other incoherent voices.  
Statues stand at attention  
As the people turn away.  
Houses and buildings  
Become husks.  
Only the Nightline Streets see.  
Only the Nightline Streets know.

## A Simple Thing, That Living Tree

By Fletcher Grey

and there, stood a Tree.  
Solemn; grounded, it Be,  
though as if I were something to never Exist,  
that Tree, celebrated, its Existence.

Scoring now, it's ever Giving  
likeness to the Scenery, where senior backgrounds made its Wake,  
towards another Beginning.

two branches, another Upbringing, as it Turned towards another Start,  
where again I, once broken, Mended myself, much like this Solemn Tree.

Hear me, oh Misery,  
as their own Mistaking were granted of me, Another spot, Another Change that  
Took from me,  
another Beginning, just like that Solemn Tree...

where Are you, my Sweet Breath, that Legacy? against all Odds do you so Grow,  
upon that Sidewalk; Upon That Branch, Upon that mistaken Symphony that breeds  
life, you too do Ring your Bells and Whistles.

and yet, I'm alone...  
I'm forgotten...  
I'm, transfixed, against the Breeze that breaks me so,  
that Long Ago did make me Free,  
I'm still Trapped against it all....  
Yet, still, here I lie;

and there, stood a Tree.  
Solemn; grounded, it Be,  
though as if I were something to never Exist,  
that Tree, celebrated, its Existence.

*A Simple Thing, That Living Tree.*

## **On the Feelings of Loneliness**

By Amanda Overy

Stuck in a house fire.  
One that burns of lilac flowers.  
The scent of of smoke and  
fresh pollen fill my lungs.

Stuck in a house fire.  
Nothing burns except  
my soul and the faces  
of those I wish I knew.

I am stuck, and  
no matter how much I try to move,  
my limbs won't cooperate.  
They mock me with inconsistency.

I am stuck and all I can do  
is smile.

## **Male-Reproduction-Organ-License**

By Katharina Oehmichen

As of 2019, every heterosexual or bisexual male with a fully functioning male reproduction organ has to register for a male-reproduction-organ-license, short MROL. Similar to your drivers license, you will have to attend safety classes on responsible sexual behavior. Intercourse without a valid MROL is a criminal offense and if you are over 18 you can be sanctioned with up to three years in jail.

The MenFirst activist group complained about the federal committee that had decided on the new male-reproduction-laws on Thursday: “87 female judges, 3 non-binary judges, but only 10 male judges voted on the MROL law! How can a committee of women decide over our bodies?” Male meminst protestors tried to obstruct the doors to the court building - the police had to interfere with pepper spray and minor impact weapons.

The situation has not yet fully calmed down but politicians from both political camps are equally in favor of the new laws. Democrat candidate Penelope Cruise stated: “We have fought for the Male-Reproduction-Organ-License for a long time. We want our kids to be more safe, we want our families to be more safe, and we want to prevent women from having to abort unwanted pregnancies.” This topic is one major step stone in the unification of political camps.

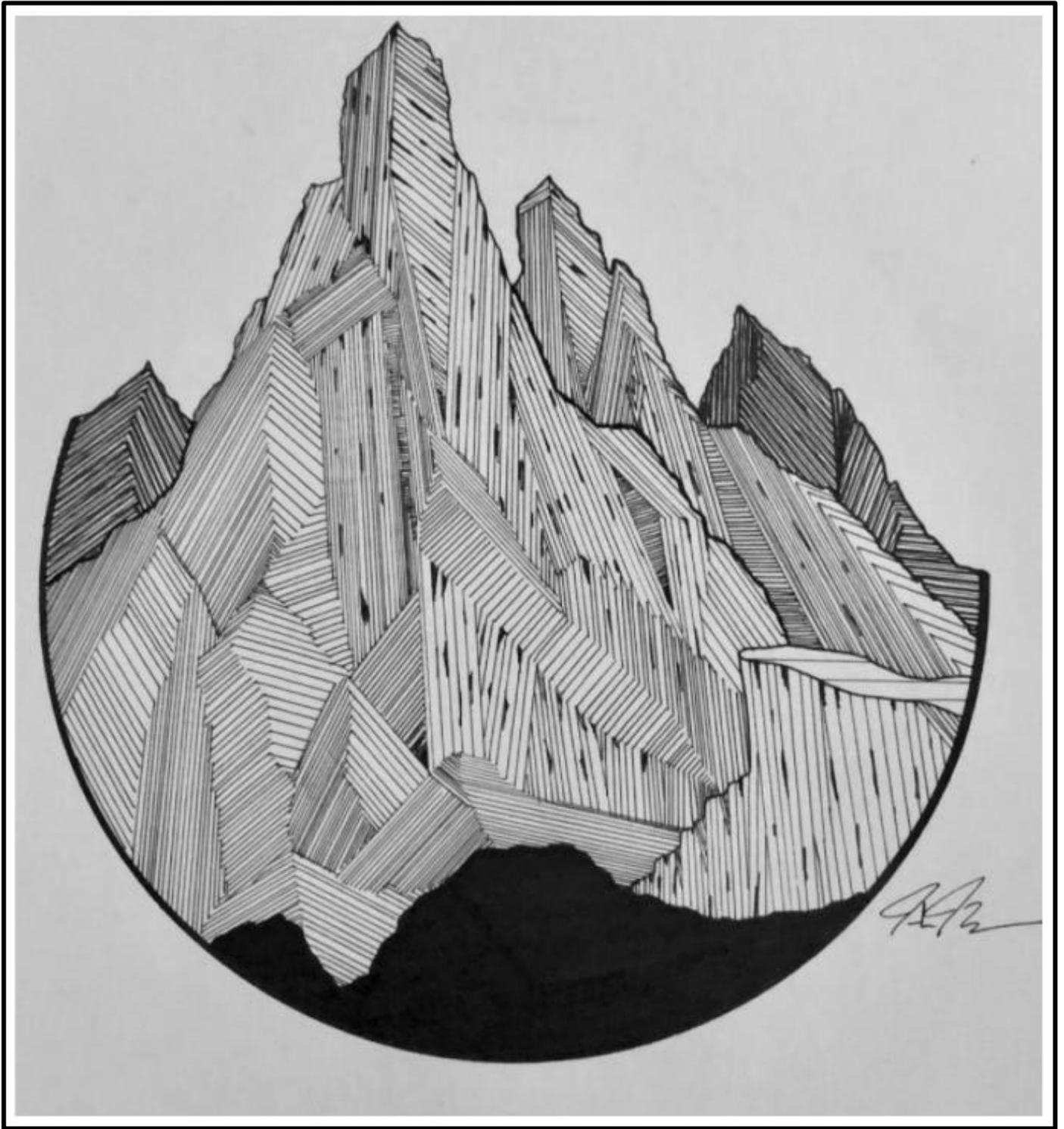
Republican and ProLife activist Molly McDonald shares Cruise’s opinion. “There was only one way to stop abortions from happening and that’s the MROL. You have to understand young boys grow up with this thing and they don’t know how to handle it. If we don’t teach them how to wield their reproductive organs, they could end up using it as a weapon to harm our daughters. A girl’s body is very valuable to our society and we need to protect their uteruses to ensure our next generation can unfold it’s full potential.

So far the new reproduction law is met with a lot of approval from the public. Many school officials report that the climate in classrooms has become less strained: “My students converse more freely with each other and we teachers don’t have to worry about the sex education classes anymore. The sex ed classes have always been primarily focused on responsible behavior on the side of the boys anyways.” (Rosa Perry, Math teacher, California)

Some gynecologists fear a decrease in patients. “We expect the teen pregnancy rates to drop rapidly in the coming years - we will lose a lot of patients,” said gynecologist Edward Miller. “It will be a hard time for clinics and pharmacy companies that produce the anti-baby-pill, the day-after-pill, and contraceptive hormone injections for women.” In response to our question, if he was already registered in the MROL database, Dr. Miller answered “[...] this stupid nonsense law is going to be repealed, you will see!”

In contrast to the memminist activists, other voices demand an extension of the law. Queer activist Bernd Fuller is convinced “The MROL could help prevent the spread of HIV and other sexual transmitted diseases in the LGBT+ community. We need to extend the law to all cisgender males equally, no exceptions!”

The conversation about the male-reproduction-organ-license law has just started. We want to encourage our readers to share their opinions about the topic. Are you a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister? Please share how the MROL law has impacted your and your family’s life. And to all our male readers: Your time to register starts now!



*Art by Jakob Kress*

## **Idle Class**

By Carly Evans

It was a dreary day that made a person hide away in her room with her best friend, pressing a puff to her cheeks lackadaisically as she sat at her vanity.

I was that person. It was my vanity, my best friend, and it was my puff I was pressing to my own cheeks in the aforementioned lackadaisical fashion.

It was a day that was dreary not because of the weather—I find no weather dreary because the weather is only doing its best and can't always be expected to be sunny and warm. Sometimes the weather needs breaks—like people. We can't always wear smiles. Sometimes we have to sit in our rooms and mope for a bit as I was doing. A little rain never hurt anyone. Except for maybe that Noah fellow in the Bible. Or, I suppose, all of the people who *weren't* Noah. But I'm neither Noah nor the people who weren't Noah at that specific point in time, and the rain had never wronged me. What *had* wronged me was my parent's insistence that I marry.

I'd been very fed up with hearing my father say *You're not going to stay young forever. Pretty women need a good man, and women like you especially need a good man.* But I'd always put on a brave face for my parents and nodded along as they listed men that they thought could work for me. I had met a few. I didn't like any of them. They were too serious for my tastes, and they didn't understand me.

My ideal man was someone who could listen to my gossip and read the same fashion magazines that I studied night and day. But many men don't read fashion magazines, and that's all fine and dandy in the end. My minimum requirements of him would just to be able to listen to me talk about my studies of fashion and carry my bags as I shopped for what the magazines had told me to buy. A woman, in my opinion, is always in need of a man who will carry her bags. It's

symbolic of their dedication. I carry a firm belief that a man should be supportive of his wife's shopping.

"I really don't want to meet this gentleman today," I said. I didn't want to meet him any day. "I'm not feeling adventurous enough. I wish I could just be his pen pal for a little bit before we rush into dinner and marriage."

"No matter what, Mr. Kingsley can't be the worst," Stella said, though she said it with a grimace. "Just remember that egg Agatha was briefly engaged to in May. He was a nightmare. I don't think a man worse than that can exist. Remember how he told her uncle how often he had been sent to bed without supper while away at school? What was it that he would do? Put thumbtacks on the teachers' chairs? And pour milk into inkwells, so the rooms would smell sour without anyone being able to tell where it was coming from until the students dipped their pens in? He was awful. No tact. *And* he chewed with his mouth open. She deserved so much better, the poor thing. I've told her over and over, though, that she needs to take a break from relationships and fill her time with education or something of the sort. Just to build her independence. Women have a lot to learn."

Stella sat on my armchair, observing me getting ready. Occasionally, she caught a glance of herself in my mirror and maybe pressed a hand to a flyaway hair sticking up from her bob cut or ran the tip of her finger along her lipstick. She wasn't always so vain (as I had sometimes been called every time I looked at myself passing by a mirror or particularly reflective window). She usually didn't care what she looked like and had her nose shoved in books or had her hands in paint. But she had taken a special interest in her makeup and hair ever since returning to America a few months ago. I had taught her everything I had learned over the years. I passed down old pencils and paints and helped trim up her hair. She was still the woman I had grown up with. Just

prettier—not that she wasn't pretty before. She was just able to draw attention to the features I had begged her to draw attention to forever—her dainty nose and lips, her almond-shaped eyes. I was glad she had gotten over her silly idea that makeup didn't do anything to make a woman feel better.

Stella and I were as similar as two peas in different pods.

She was as smart and cultured as anyone could ever get. Over the summer, she had gone to Paris to study art. In the letters she wrote me, she told me how she spent her mornings in museums, her afternoons in cafés chatting with people of similar intelligence, and her evenings painting under the instruction of a young, French bohemian man. It sounded fairly boring to me, but she wrote such beautiful letters and occasionally included little sketches on cardstock. She told me about the people she met—all fancy writers that she insisted I read as soon as possible. I bought all of the books she told me about, but I never read them. They only served to fill my bookshelf that had remained empty since my childhood. They looked beautiful sitting there, and I encouraged Stella to recommend me more while she was abroad.

Stella was really the only one who made me feel better in her letters. She was grounded, and she always knew what to say. She would recommend me even more books to empower my female spirit. They weren't as attractive as the prettier ones she talked about. The titles themselves put me to sleep and the authors were usually dead, but I took her word that they were very good. I just couldn't have old books in my possession. They wouldn't be in style.

Before I go any further with this story, I don't want you thinking that Stella is any sort of drag. I'll have you know that she knows a good time when she sees one. While in Paris—the city of art and love and such romantic stuff—she took good advantage of the alcohol. The Good Samaritans such as myself hadn't had a drop in America since the prohibition. Stella missed it

sorely and drank the finest wine she could get her hands on while abroad. I had imagined that her Bohemian lover, Victor, had whisked her away to his little apartment every night after a bottle and shown her what men from the city had to offer. She didn't really say it to me, but I understood the twinkle in her eyes and the blush on her cheeks when she talked about him. She was going to go back to Paris and take me with her to meet her artist. I was thrilled to meet him and see what kind of influence he had on my Stella.

Stella had her whole life planned ahead of her. She would marry an intelligent artist, they would have little artist children, and she could spend all her time reading the novels she loved so much and painting because her children would be little, wonderfully well-behaved creatures that would obey every word their fair parents would tell them. When she got tired of painting, she would turn to writing essays about—what does she call it? Feminism? She could write essay upon essay about that. She would have a lovely cook in her home and a delightful maid that never snatched an earring or couple of coins when no one was around. I once had a maid who took one of my favorite bracelets, and I had the hardest time asking for it back. I eventually told my father, and she was fired the next day.

I hadn't the foggiest clue what my future would be like.

“What do you think he's like?” I asked.

“Mr. Kingsley?”

“Of course.”

“I think he'll be nice,” Stella said.

She shrugged. A sign of indifference. She looked away as well, and I wondered if she was hiding something that was ruffling her feathers.

“Nice?” I asked

“Nice enough. I can imagine the man your parents would find for you. He’s probably the same type of egg as your father.”

She was doing her best to avoid my eyes, and she frowned so heavily. I pushed on with the conversation anyways.

“That’s what I’m worried about. Maybe I don’t want to marry a paternal-imitating egg. Maybe I’d like to be with a poet.”

“A poet?”

“Or someone like that. Someone not involved in business. Maybe a film actor would suit me better?”

Stella almost laughed. “How are you going to meet a film actor? Your family isn’t *that* important.”

“I could become an actress.”

“You?”

“I think I could make a career in the movies. Be a sweetheart. You know, like Mary Pickford.”

“Really?”

“Yes. It’s not as though they talk much. I wouldn’t have any lines to learn.”

Stella hummed. She was amused by my plan, I could tell, but she didn’t realize that I was being absolutely serious. I had dabbled in theatre in school—as she very well knew—and had gotten the role of one of the maids in *Hamlet*. And theatre, I’ve heard, is much more challenging than films. If I was an astounding maid, then I would be phenomenal in films. As I had just said to Stella, film actors have no lines.

“Think of how little we know about how good these actors are at delivering lines. I have it on good authority that that Chaplin fellow has an English accent,” I said. “Can you believe that? An English accent!”

“Most people from England, I believe, have English accents. And I’m not sure if an accent dictates how good someone is at acting.”

Stella wasn’t keeping up. Of course, the accent didn’t mean anything to his acting. It was the fact that we didn’t know he had an accent. If we couldn’t even place something so big as his country of origin then how would we know if he was any good at monologues? It was as if she didn’t want to have this conversation.

“As I was saying,” I said, putting my nose in the air. “I think I would make a fine film actress. All I would have to do is make those poses and move my mouth a bit. Mary Pickford is so glamorous, wouldn’t you say? And Douglas Fairbanks.”

“Of course.”

“I could be glamorous. I could go to those parties and premieres. I’m just as pretty as the rest of them.”

“You really want to be known as just pretty? Darling, you wouldn’t have a voice. You’d just be a face. Are you sure you’re okay with that?”

“It’s more than just being a pretty face on screen. I’d have to be in the public. I’d have to play tennis!”

“Tennis?”

“Yes! Haven’t you seen those pictures of Charles Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks playing tennis? All movie stars must do it.”

“I’m not sure where your mind goes sometimes.”

“Stella keep up! This is important. This is my *future*.”

I felt bad for the dear. She had such a one-track mind. It made conversations with her so hard at times.

“Do you think Mr. Kingsley plays tennis?” I asked. “It would be delightful if he did.”

Stella didn’t answer. Her face had taken on a somber look—the same look my mother had when she had told me that my pet fish had to go to the country to soothe his nerves. I never saw him again. My mother told me that he had found a better life, and he would be healthier with his new family. I always suspected that he had really died.

I worried about Stella’s face. She pressed her lips together in a thin line and drew her eyebrows together. She looked nervous to speak. The conversation wasn’t about tennis or movies anymore.

“Can I be frank?” Stella asked.

“You can be anything you want to be.”

I was ashamed that my voice wasn’t stronger, but, you see, I’m not a fan of serious conversations. My parents always avoided them, and I never learned how to cope when presented with one.

“It doesn’t matter if he plays tennis or not,” Stella began. “I don’t think you want to meet *any* man for dinner that your father chooses for you. It doesn’t matter if Mr. Kingsley is exactly like you, your relationship isn’t going to work because it’s forced. And furthermore, I don’t think it’s right for your father to do this. You should be able to find a man on your own—or find no man if that’s what you want. I have no doubt that your father has your best interest in heart, but for God’s sakes, it’s 1927. We’re free.”

I smiled as well as I could. For Stella's sake. I think a lot of people were so used to my happy demeanor that they had come to rely on it.

"This is how things are," I said, trying to sound casual. "My parents are depending on this."

"I'm being serious," she snapped. "It's not right for you to marry whoever they want while other girls are going out, voting, getting jobs, and driving! You still haven't learned to drive even though you promised me you would!"

"That's different!" My voice was raising, and I suppose it sounded a bit like my mother's. "Driving is scary! I'm not sure how you do it. I can't sit behind a hunk of metal and not hit anyone—"

"Because your parents have told you that you shouldn't drive. I told you I would teach you."

"I don't have to drive to embrace these womanly rights you're always talking about."

"Maybe not, but it's more than driving. You freeze in any situation. Driving would teach you how to take control. To take yourself to where you need—*want*—to go with no one else able to stop you. To feel yourself leave behind your home for just a little bit." Stella looked at her lap for a moment and took a deep breath. When she spoke again, her voice was calm again. "You at least need to stand up to your parents. You need to tell them that you're going to find someone for yourself."

I didn't want to fight. I hated fights. I believed I was allergic to them and had been meaning to talk to a doctor about it.

I crossed the room to sit on the ottoman in front of her chair. My mother had picked out all the furniture in the room. I sat forward a little bit. I could feel my dress riding up my thigh as it caught on the ottoman.

The first time I had come out of my room in a short dress, my parents had thrown a fit. They said that modern dresses didn't get a woman respect. My mother even called me a harlot, and I was offended when I looked it up in the dictionary later that evening. I was also surprised (and a little impressed) that my mother knew such a big word. Stella would have been proud of me if she had seen me lifting my chin and telling them *It's fashionable, and I'm not going to be caught dead in something that looks like it's from the War*. She would have clapped and told me over lunch that the suffragettes had a similar attitude. Instead, she embraced me when she saw me that same day and said *We're liberated—knees and all*. While she wasn't the most up-to-date on fashion, her bare knees were the first I saw.

"It's not that easy," I said to Stella. I couldn't be angry. It wasn't an emotion I was very keen on. "I have a responsibility. You can meet French artists and paint sunsets. You have a brother who's taking care of the family. I'm all my parents have, and I have to do this for them."

"You don't owe anyone anything."

"I *do*. I owe my parents a son-in-law and an heir, and I owe Mr. Kingsley dinner in an hour."

My chest felt tight. I grabbed my necklace that hung so low that it almost rested in my lap. I would have to change into jewelry more conservative before I left. But before then, I would roll the pearls closest to my chest between my fingers. My mother would have told me that ladies didn't fidget. *Ladies are statues*, she would tell me. I always asked her about our relationship

with pigeons when I saw them gather on grey stone in the city, and she would only answer *Just do your best to be polite to them.*

“Think about who are you,” Stella said. “Because I don’t think you know who that is.”

“I know who I am.”

“Yeah? Then who are you?”

It wasn’t a fair question. No one would know how to answer that. I knew who I was as well as anyone else. Stella wouldn’t go up to a random person on the streets and ask them as sternly as she asked me without getting an odd look or a business card.

“You used to tell me that doing whatever your parents wanted infuriated you. What happened to that girl?”

She grew up.

I wasn’t a little girl anymore, pouting because my parents made me go to a stuffy dinner while Stella was never forced to meet her parents’ drab friends. I was an adult, and I was realizing that a lot more compromises had to be made. The more I learned about the world, the more I realized how much I was missing out on.

“If you want to be Mrs. Kingsley or Mrs. Whoever-Your-Parents-Find, then I won’t hold you back. You know I’d support you in whatever you choose to do. But I’m scared for you. Don’t convince yourself that you want this. I know you have a brain in there somewhere.” She smiled a little. “You can use it to think for yourself.”

“I don’t use it for much else, I suppose.”

“Exactly.”

“I’m not sure about this. I don’t want to disappoint my parents. Or Mr. Kingsley. He’s done nothing wrong.”

“Would you rather disappoint yourself? Make a life with a man you hardly know and have his children and spend your days with a stranger? You can go to dinner with him tonight, *or* I can take you out. It’ll be just the two of us. We haven’t had dinner together in a while, have we? I still haven’t told you about my last letter from Victor.”

“Let me think about this. It’s making my head ache.”

I looked to my vanity only to avoid Stella’s eyes. I had my makeup sitting out, ready to touch up what was already on my face. My hairbrush was next to the powders and lipsticks for when I had to pull out tangles before I left. I even had my outfit hanging on my wardrobe door. It was the only outfit my mother had approved of. It was the longest skirt I owned, and the blouse with the highest neck. It was such a bland color. Light blue. Close to grey like an old woman’s hair. I was fond of black dresses and bright blouses. I should have thrown it out a year ago. I had wanted to vomit over how old I looked. I looked as old as the women that gave me dirty looks when I went into town. I looked as old as my *mother*. I could have been going to church in that outfit, for Christ’s sake! No respectable girl of my age should have been forced into that.

I took great care to read about the newest fashions and trends from everywhere—England, France, Japan, etc. I had cut off my hair at 17 when I realized (way too late I confess) that long hair in updos had been out of fashion for quite some time. I transformed overnight. I looked like Edna Purviance. I had thought about getting on a train to Hollywood to show a movie director that I had the look. I had the short waves even if they were a bit crooked. My jaw and neck were exposed, and I felt scandalous. My mother almost fainted.

I discovered makeup the same year. I learned how to hold my hand steady to apply eyelashes and how to draw a cupid’s bow on my lips that Clara Bow herself would be jealous of. I propped up magazines next to my mirror and yanked at my eyebrows with tweezers until they

looked similar to what I was seeing. I found a shade of blush that didn't make me look like I had an odd infection but instead had spent a decent amount of time laughing and being happy. I painted thin lines around my eyes and dabbed a modest amount of eyeshadow on my lids. Stella and I had helped each other find powders that would make us look paler but not like corpses. I practiced my pout in the mirror and experimented with holding my head at different angles.

Stella looked at her wristwatch in resignation.

"I should be leaving."

She stood. I grabbed her hand.

"Don't be cross," I said. "I have no other options."

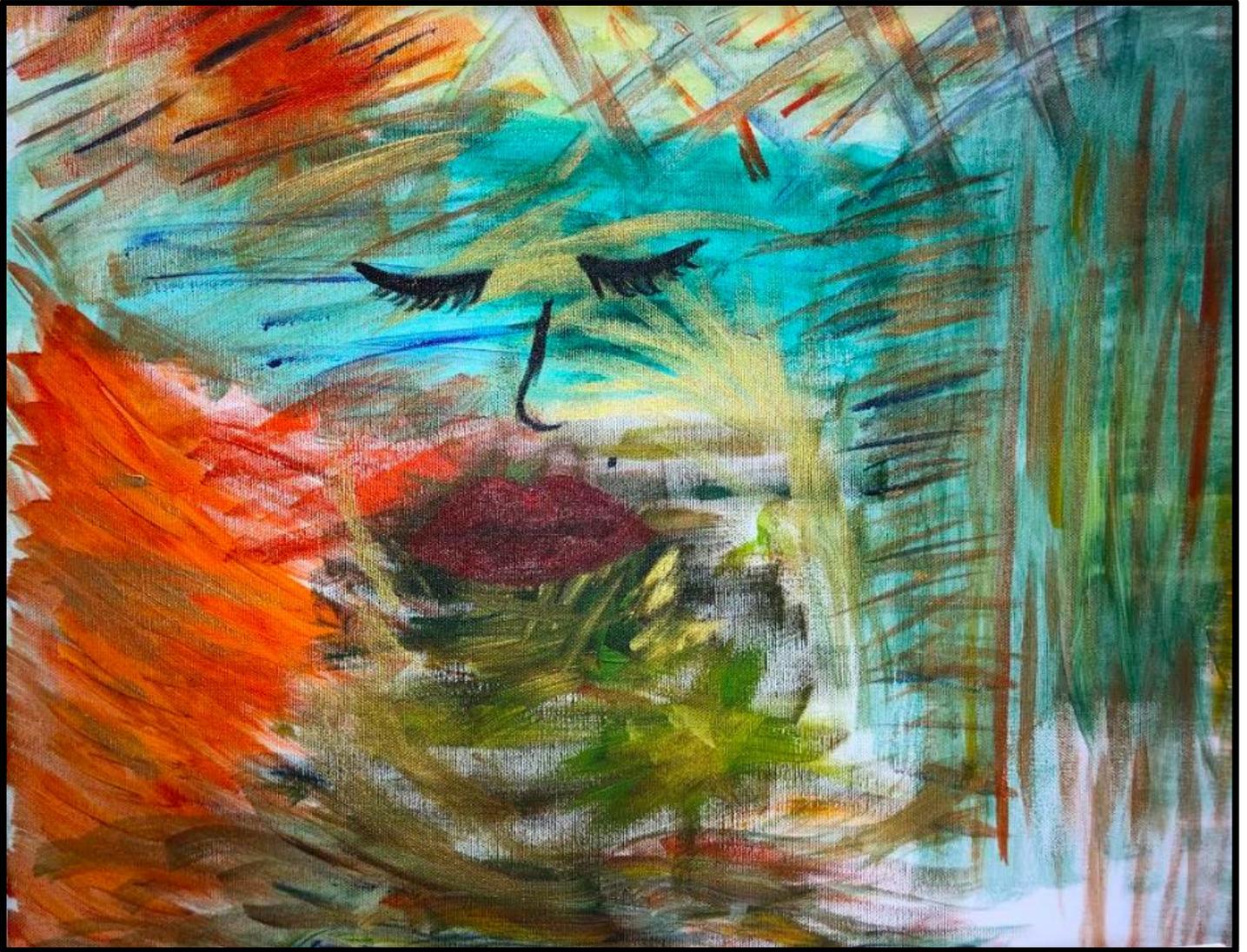
She scoffed and shook her head. "The thing is, dear, is that you really do. And I hope that you realize that tonight. If you need me, I'll be at home."

I stared at her. She was really very beautiful. Even without her makeup, I knew how beautiful she was. She's the type of beautiful you don't see in magazines or in pictures. Her eyes were thoughtful and everyone always felt so welcomed the second they looked into them. Her face glowed—the result from years of kindness.

"Can I call you after dinner?"

"Of course."

And Stella left, and I was alone.



*Art by Ivy Connolly*

# **The End: The Last Story of Time Agent 85**

## **By Brianne Tufts**

It's 2165. Time travel is a reality for many, but there are those who want to change our reality as we know it. That's why they created the TTPA, the Time Travel Protection Agency. Most in time travel circles call it the Agency. They hire and train people to travel through time and stop the criminals that want to change history as we know it and thereby changing our current reality. Some want to better the worst parts of history, while others want to make these same parts of history even worse or last longer. Every new recruit has to deal with the former. They're good for practice when it comes to trying to figure out their plans and how to stop them. The latter--well, these criminals are for the more experienced, like me.

I am Agent 85, one of the most experienced members of the TTPA. I've been an agent since I was sixteen years old. Now, I am twenty-seven. My real name is kept secret from everyone (including myself) for that is how the Agency protects the timelines--by wiping the true names of their agents and giving them numbers instead. Once an agent retires, their true name is given back to them. However, I still have many more years to go before I can retire. I do get to keep my past, but it is not one of tragedy or of always dreaming of being a time agent like my father. I simply thought it would be a good option. Time agents get paid decent money for a job they have for a long time. That was it. The deeper I got into the job, the more I began to like it. I liked putting criminals behind bars.

*Enough thinking about your life, I chide to myself. There's work to be done.*

I continue updating the data in the files. I hate doing this. It's the most boring thing in the world to do. I sigh--a deep heavy kind of sigh.

Suddenly, I hear, "Agent 85!"

I know the deep, gruff voice that belonged to.

I look up. My boss is standing in front of my desk. He does not look happy, but then again he never does. It's all business with him.

"Chief, what can I do for you?" I ask as I lean back in my chair.

"We have a new case. Get ready, now," he says. He walks away, knowing I'll follow right behind.

"What is it this time?" I ask as I follow him down the halls of the agency.

"It's him again. This time it's England, 1963. There isn't an event we can think of that happens in that country during that year that would drastically change anything. Here's a list of all the events that we could think of as possibilities. What does he plan to do?"

I don't have to ask who "him" was. I knew. The villain who always gets away and who tries to change things for the better *and* the worst. It's always impossible to guess what he's planning on doing. This time is no different. He's the most clever of all the criminals, always one step ahead of us. He's the only serial time criminal ever.

"Do you know the specific date or at least the month?" I ask.

"Yeah, early November of that year. You know what you need to do, right?"

"Yes, sir."

By this time, we're in the room with all the time vortex manipulators, or TVMs for short. They're basically like time machine you wear on your wrist. They're nothing like the original time machines that were just big machines with complicated controls that you had to climb inside of and easily stood out. These are easier to use and are easier to hide. To the left inside this room is a whole room full of clothing from every country and every era. I go into the Wardrobe, as we like to call it, and choose a proper outfit from the time period.

I grab one of the TVMs and strap it to my wrist and stand on the platform in the middle of the room that helps to fix the specific location of the mission. That's the one problem with the TVMs. It's easy to go to a specific time but not a specific place. I put in the information about where and when I want to go, nod to the techie working the platform and...

Nothing. That's all I feel for a while. Nothing. This is the point when I wonder what the other agents say their experiences of time travel are. Many say they feel like they're on a rollercoaster with lights all around. But for me, there's nothing, then suddenly light.

This time it's the light of the sun shining down. It's cold, but I managed to grab a coat from the Wardrobe. I'm standing in an alley in the middle of a city. I walk out to the sidewalk and see a man walking past.

"Excuse me, sir," I say to get his attention. "I'm pretty forgetful. Could you tell me what the date is today?"

"Sure, bloke, it's the fourth of November."

"Thank you," I say. The man nods and walks away.

*What could be so important about November 1963 that would want to make him come here? What happens in this month of this year?* I think to myself. I look at the list Chief gave me, but nothing stands out right away that could cause any drastic change.

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I've been in 1963 for a couple days over a week and still haven't found a single clue to what he's up to. I haven't found him, either. I did find out, however, that I'm currently in London and the science fiction (as they call the genre) show called *Doctor Who* is airing near the end of this month. This show was apparently extremely popular when it was around, or in this case will be. Fortunately for the show, it runs for over a century before it ends, meanwhile

helping us to take interest in time travel. Unfortunately, I have never had the chance to see the show because they stopped showing it to anyone but the people who make the TVMs.

*Enough thinking to yourself. You still need to figure out what that criminal is up to,* I remind myself as I walk through London. That's when I see him. Just sitting on a bench with another man in the street. The two are just talking. The other man leaves. The criminal one leaves in another direction. I follow him, keeping in the shadows of the London streets. I follow him down streets and alleys. Sometimes, I think he knows I'm tailing him. Other times I think he's just trying to make sure no one is following by taking sudden turns. I hope I can corner him in someplace away from the crowds of London's streets.

He stops at a phone booth and goes in. I get as close as I can to booth and try to hear what he's saying to the person on the other end. All I can make out though is something about a TV station and a show not airing this Saturday. That's the day *Doctor Who* will air, and if that show doesn't air, then time travel won't be possible and maybe never will be. That's when Tucker gets out of the booth. He looks to the where I'm hiding close to the booth and smiles. I step out of my hiding place.

"Agent 85, I should've expected you would try and stop me. But it won't do you any good. The TV station is already convinced *Doctor Who* will have a negative influence on people and are refusing to air it," Tucker says stepping towards me. He has a huge grin of triumph on his face. "Though I suppose I should make sure you can't stop me."

He takes a swing at me, I duck out of the way. He uses his other hand to hit my side. It hurts, but I ignore the pain. We keep at it in the middle of the street as a crowd gathers and attracts the attention of a cop nearby, forcing him to head in our direction. I give Tucker a good blow to the face, knocking him out. I take hold of Tucker and drag him through the crowd into

an alley. I quickly push the button on my TVM to let them know I've caught Tucker, finally, and to bring us back. I grab hold of Tucker so he can be brought back with me to the Agency.

Once back on the platform, Chief is standing there with two men. They come and take the now conscious Tucker away. Chief comes up to me and pats me on the back.

“Well done. You've finally caught Tucker.”

“Yeah, but I need to go back. I need to stop what Tucker set into motion.”

“What? But nothing has happened, the timeline is safe.”

“Yes, but I still need to go back and make sure it stays that way.”

“The look on your face tells me you should--so, go. Get ready boys,” Chief says as he steps down from the platform.

I tell them to send me to the TV station specifically, instead of just someplace in London. They give me the okay on this order, they may not understand why, but they don't ask questions.

This time, I'm in an alley next to a building with “BBC” on it. I go around front and walk in. A woman sits behind the desk just inside the front doors. I ask her the date. She tells me it's the twenty-second. Damn, that means I have only today and possibly tomorrow to get that show to air and make sure the timeline is on track--at the very least to get the show to be put on TV at all, which would be an improvement from never.

I walk up to the woman and ask if I could see the station manager. She tells me they're in their office right now. I ask where the office is. She tells me down the hall, on the right, then she tells me the room number, but that I can't go in unless I have an appointment. I ignore that last comment and head that way as quickly as I can. I hear her trying to stop me by telling me that I can't go to there without an appointment. She's probably alerting this guy right now that I'm

coming, or calling security, possibly both. I hope it's only the former, because it would be really bad if I got thrown out right now. That would mean never being able to walk back in here again.

Running down the hall, I go past men caring clipboards and debating with one another about the industry. They yell as I run past to watch where I'm going. I don't slow down. I continue to run until I've run past the room. I stop and jog back down the hall in the direction of the room. "Station Manager Morgan" is on the door. Finally.

I force the door to the room open, still out of breath from the running. Sitting behind a big metal desk with papers all over the place was a woman. A tall, black-haired, thin woman dressed in business attire. This was the last thing I expect to see in the sixties: a woman in charge of something as big as television. At least part of it anyway. Morgan looks up after I open the door. She smiles and stands, walking toward where I still stand in the doorway.

"So you're the man Karen warned me was coming," she says.

I nod in response. "I need... to talk to you... about a specific show," I say in between breaths.

"Well, what show?" She asks.

"The show that another man who called here a week ago convinced you not to show."

"Oh, I know which one you mean. It took him awhile, but he was able to convince me of nothing of the sort."

"Really? Then you're still going to air the show on TV tomorrow?"

"No, I was never going to put the show on in the first place. That's what the man was actually calling to make sure of. That and to hear from me, his wife."

The news shocked me. No one said anything about Tucker having a wife--not even Tucker. I was at a loss for words. My shocked expression must have been priceless because she laughs.

“Oh my. You really weren’t expecting that, now were you?” Morgan asks. A mocking tone had begun to creep into her voice. “The Agency never thought that it was a woman behind all those plans did they? Tucker really is a great husband, following all my plans to the letter, he is so easily manipulated into doing what I want. Even the plans I thought of for us to get away from you Agent 85. Which reminds me, thank you for ‘saving’ me from my own husband. We were able escape from you and try again.”

I’m even more stunned by this than I was at the previous news. I never noticed what the people he threatened looked like. Only if they were a man, woman, or a child. Nothing more because it didn’t really matter as long as they weren’t killed by him. That was all. To think that some of those victims were his own wife. And now I find out that she was the mastermind all along. She was my only hope of making sure the timeline stayed the same.

“You have no idea what you should do now, do you?” She asks me. “You were hoping to convince me to put the show back on the air, but now that you know the truth, there’s nothing you can do.”

“You’re wrong. I can still try to convince you,” I say stepping closer to her so that we’re face to face. “You have no idea what you’re doing right now. Doing this could prevent scientists from ever trying to create time travel, thinking that there is no use for it in any capacity. Time travel would no longer exist. You would never be able to try to attempt to change the past like you want to.”

“Exactly. I would never be given the idea by my father that should change the past. That I should make the present day better because I could since time travel was possible. I wouldn’t have to hear him complain about the Agency or all the criminals who fail because they’re not smart enough to do what he could have done better. The ‘he’ which eventually was a ‘you’ directed at me once I was old enough to understand what my father was talking about. This also means there won’t be criminals trying to change the past. You’ll be free to have your name again, to do whatever is you want to do.” Her voice is now pleading, trying to get to the me.

“I chose to be a time agent, and I love my job,” I say angrily. “I wouldn’t have changed anything. Now how do I get the show to air on TV tomorrow?”

“You don’t,” she says. She walks back behind the desk.

I follow her behind the desk and kick the chair away from it before she can sit down. Then I do something I never thought I would have to do. I punch her in the face. She stumbles backward, but quickly regains her balance tries to kick me. I quickly move out of reach. She then comes at me with her right fist, but I block it by grabbing her fist. She kicks my leg hard and my grip on her loosens enough for her to wrench it from my hand and give me a blow to my left eye. I recover quickly from the blow, but the pain still distracts me as I give a blow to the stomach. She doubles over as I lift my foot to give her a good kick in the face. She falls to the ground, unconscious.

Security guards must have heard the scuffle as they were walking by because two ran into the room. One of them fires a stun gun, shocking me. I’ve failed to save the timeline. Everything will change. That’s when I black out.

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“Yes, and then what happened?” Dr. Young asks me.

“Nothing. At least nothing I can remember anyway. It sounds crazy, doesn’t it?”

“Most certainly. Thinking that time travel was real. This might be the twenty-second century, but time travel has only just been a thought in the minds of scientists and inventors.”

“Do you think I should come back to talk about my visions more?”

“Yes, you should. I think it would help you to ground yourself in the reality of today.”

“Okay,” I say.

We make an appointment to talk more about these crazy visions I’ve been having about me being a time agent and all. I’m glad my friend Tucker gave me the number for the psychologist his wife has. I think this will really help me in the long run. Especially for understanding why I wanted to kill his wife in the end of that last one. That was just not me.

I walk back home, feeling better knowing that I’m going to get help for these visions I keep having that feel almost like memories. Sometimes I think they are actually memories. I wonder why?



*Photo by Erin Brown*

## **Matters of Life**

By Elyssa Williams

“Well, what do you want to do?”

Moira is excited, but she’s trying so hard to keep her emotions out of the conversation. She’s trying to give Vince time to think this through rationally. He can tell by the way the corner of her mouth twitches like she’s going to burst into exhilarated giggles at any second and how her hands jerk minutely. Those hands, they are surgeon’s hands. He knows that. He’s seen them at work many times. She’d smuggled him into the viewing gallery so many times during her residency that none of her attending physicians even bat an eye anymore when he turns up in borrowed scrubs and ducks into the room just after the first cut and when everyone is already starstruck by her calm control of the room. That large, spotless, sterile operating theatre is her classroom as much as the little room with painting-covered walls at T.C. Elementary School is his.

Vince stares at the letter again in silence. And again, Moira’s hands twitch in his peripheral like she wants to snatch it out of his hands and read it to him instead. This is a great opportunity for her. This is *huge*. The best fellowship program in the country he remembers her saying, and they *want* her. They want *her*. But Vince does, too.

His minds reels as he thinks of everything he... *they*... would be giving up. His kids, all of them, even the ones who have moved on but still wave at him every day in the cafeteria. Their house, even though they haven’t made the full decision to buy it, yet, but it’s still *theirs*. This town, where they grew up together and where they fell in love. Yet, now she’s being offered this once in a life opportunity, and she wants it so bad.

Vince stands silently for a few more long minutes. He's been silent for so long that Moira's excitement is starting to fade. The corners of her mouth fall, and her hands clench. Vince takes one deep breath and then two and three before he's ready to speak. "Okay," he says. "Let's go."

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"Well, what do you want to do?"

Vince knows what he wants to do. He's known for years, actually. He remembers the day his nephew was born and how, the second Moira gently cradled him in her arms, she'd met his eyes and beamed like she was holding the second coming. That baby was in her arms for all of ten minutes and, except for that quick meeting of their eyes, she had stared at that little round, red face the whole time, and his brother almost had to pry his new baby out of her hands so his wife could finally hold their baby. They spent most of that day traipsing from store to store so Moira could find the perfect new onesie and blanket and stuffed animal for the baby, and then they'd returned to the hospital so she could hold him for ten more minutes.

He wants to marry her. That's what he wants to do. He wants a life with her.

"What are the options? What will save her?"

"I'm afraid there's not much we *can* do. The infection continues to worsen despite our best efforts. The antibiotics simply are not strong enough. Soon, the infection will reach her bone, and then it's almost impossible to save the bone."

"Well, then you do everything you can, I don't care what it takes," Vince says roughly.

The man standing in front of him pulls a pen from the pocket of his white, crisp coat and opens the binder in his hands. He's searching for something in that binder, ruffling through the thick stack of papers, and Vince's heart sinks when he sees the first form he pulls out.

“No. No! NO, I don’t care what you have to do, I’m not signing a damn DNR. Extreme measures, whatever it takes, you have to do it! You have to save her! Stop looking at me, and save her goddammit! You have to save her, you have to, I can’t— you have to— sh-she can’t—”

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“Well, what do you want to do?”

After everything they’ve been through, it’s his turn to ask that question. It’s their last day of therapy, and Moira will be able to return to work next week. Even though she has a prosthetic now, she’ll still be able to stand and walk around the hospital like the accident didn’t even happen. That’s what they’ve been doing for the past few weeks of therapy, working up her muscles and stamina so that she can stand for hours of a time like she’ll need to do when she operates. The hospital set her up with the best prosthetist they could find, and now, after weeks of trial and error, she can hardly even feel the socket at all and knows exactly how much weight she can put on it. She’s done so well with this whole process and thankfully, even though she’s been out for months, she’s far enough into her fellowship that she’s not too behind and the hospital still wants her in the program. They’ve got the rest of their lives to look forward to if she would just stop staring at the box like it’s bomb.

For the first time in what feels like forever, Vince can’t read her. He has absolutely no idea what she’s thinking, and it terrifies him. But, this time, the decision is hers, and he’s going to give her as much time as she gave him to think it through. This is a big decision, too, this is just as huge as their choice to move across the country for her education and career. This is life changing. He’s going to give her as much time as she needs because she’s still drained from almost a year of recovery and then physical therapy and even some regular, how-does-that-make-

you-feel therapy, and he knows this is a lot for her to think about right now. Shit, this is too much for her to think about right now, he should have waited, he should have planned this better instead of dropping to the floor in the middle of dinner on a regular, boring Tuesday night.

Vince is opening his mouth to tell her all of that, to tell her not to rush, they've got time and—

Moira's looking up at him and meeting his gaze. Her face transforms as she gives him that same smile she gave him in the hospital at his sister-in-law's bedside and a newborn baby in her arms.

“Okay,” she says. “Let's do it. Let's get married.”

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“Well, what do you want to do?”

“I don't— I don't know,”

“That's what you said two weeks ago, Mo. We've talked about this a thousand times, what else—”

“I said I don't know, okay, Vince?!”

“Mo. C'mon on, you can't seriously be thinking about having a—”

“Vincent. Stop. I told you I'm not ready. This could ruin my career. I've been working so hard my whole life to get where I am now, and I'm not going to throw it all away when I'm this close!”

“And I wouldn't want you to! Who says that's going to happen? You know they'll still want you, and you can take as much time off as you want. And I can take leave, too, I'll even quit, and I can stay home, you don't have to! I'll do everything, you don't have to worry about a thing.”

“I’m just— I’m not ready, Vince. You knew when we married I never wanted this.”

“No, I didn’t! You never told me!”

“Yes, I did! I told you weeks ago, after Tam’s shower!”

“I meant, before we got married. You never told me before that.”

“Well, I wanted to wait until it was relevant to our relationship, smartass, and we didn’t really talk in the two hours between you proposing and going to the courthouse.”

“Ha! You wanted to wait until it was ‘relevant’ to our relationship? Goddammit, Mo, we’ve been together since we were sixteen for fucks sake! You’ve known for years that this is what I’ve always wanted, and I thought you wanted it, too. You never said otherwise when we talked about star—”

“You mean when you talked?”

“What?”

“When *you* talked about it, I never said anything because I could never get a word in edgewise. Every time you brought it up, I told you I wasn’t ready, that I might never be ready, and what did you always say? ‘Oh, not right now, of course, but you will be, later. You’ll be ready.’ Always putting words in my mouth or ignoring what I actually say, that’s so typical of you!”

“So, what are you saying.”

“You know.”

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Tam’s mom was a junkie. Tam tells him that her mom was either gone looking for drugs or passed out on the couch. Sometimes, when she’d gone a few days without, she’d finally talk to

Tam. She'd tell her about how she never wanted a baby and how Tam was useless, a disappointment, a burden. She had hated Tam so much, his friend says, that she ruined her. Her mother never wanted her, and that ruined her. And Moira wouldn't want to do that. No, Tam tells him, Moira would try so hard to be the exact opposite that she would ruin herself, instead.

Vince goes with her, and he holds her hand. He nods along with her when they're asked if they are absolutely sure this is what they want. A part of him dies, too, that day.

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They haven't even looked at each other in weeks, and they stopped talking even before that. Hell, they've hardly been in the same room as one another since then. He sleeps on the couch downstairs when she's home. More frequently these days, though, she's been sleeping at the hospital. He still can't make himself sleep in their bed.

Tam and Daniel invite them to their house for a birthday party, for their chief of surgery, he thinks. Well, Daniel invites Vince and Tam invites Moira. That's how their relationship works these days. Vince feels terrible for forcing their friends in the middle of this, but he feels even worse thinking about his wife so he doesn't try to stop them. That's a bad sign for their marriage, obviously, but he can't bring himself to care for now, so he goes to the party so he can at least try to salvage the few relationships he has left.

The party is in full swing when he gets there. So many people crowd the front room. They all try to stop him for small chit chat, but he ignores them and walks to the kitchen instead. He needs a drink if he's going to survive this.

Except, Vince runs into Moira the second he steps through the door. She looks surprised to see him there, and her mouth opens and closes a few times but she can't seem to force any

words out. He knows he's blocking the door, should move out of the way so she can leave, and so he can breathe again, but he's locked in place.

They stare at each other in silence for few long, awkward moments before Vince startles them both by speaking first.

"The lawyer wants to know what we want to do about the house."

"It's your house." She shrugs and says, "Do what you want."

"What, like you're not even going to try to fight for it?"

"What," she mocks, "like you're even going to listen to what I want?"

The laugh that bubbles from his throat is so raw it hurts.

"What," she says again. Her confusion is comic. He laughs again, and he keeps laughing until his sides hurt. And now, she's not just angry, she's angry and pissed.

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

It takes Vince a few moments to reign his laughter in and pull himself together enough to speak coherently.

"You think I wouldn't listen to what you want? God, you're so stupid. I've *always* listened to what you wanted. Almost my whole life, I've listened to what you wanted. I let you drag me across the fucking country because I listened to what you wanted, dammit. It's always about you, it's always about what *you* want. We do what *you* want, we live how *you* want, we always do what *you* want, all the time, and I loved you enough to do it. But you're so damn selfish you could never do the same for me, could you? Not even when I begged you, when I did everything I could to make sure you wouldn't be burdened. I did everything for you! I *gave* everything for you, and you never once tried to do the same for me!"

Vince knows, realistically, that he's speaking very loud, probably even yelling. He's knows that the music in the front room isn't loud enough to drown out his words, but he can't make himself be quieter.

Moira can though, apparently, because her voice is steely and low when she finally replies.

"It comes back to this." It isn't a question, he can see that she already knows the truth, but he answers anyway.

"Yeah. Yeah, I guess it does."

"You blame me." It's a realization, again, not a question. She speaks like she's solving a problem she's spent days, weeks trying to figure out, like she finally knows how to remove a particularly deadly tumor or what disease a patient's symptoms indicate.

"You don't get to punish me for that anymore. You went with me, stood by my side to see through a decision *we* made together. You stood beside me and you held my hand as I exercised my *right* to choose, and you said were okay with it."

"Well, maybe I wasn't okay with it!"

"Well, that's not my fault. I wasn't okay with you chopping off my fucking leg, but I lived through it anyway because you said you couldn't live without me. I didn't even get a voice in that decision that *you* made for *me* but I fucking let it go, okay, because at least I lived, and we could still be together. And I *asked* you what you wanted, we talked about it for weeks before I made a decision. You *agreed* with my decision, with our decision, and you went with me. I thought you were okay with it! I forgave you for letting them take my leg, I thought you forgave m—

“This is *not* the same thing, you and your fucking leg! *You killed our baby, I can never forgive that!*”

There’s silence in the kitchen, and there’s silence in the front room.

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“Well, what do you want to do?”

They sign the blue papers.