



MORPHEUS

L I T E R A R Y M A G A Z I N E

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Morpheus Literary Magazine

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

I am pleased to share the Fall 2023 issue of the *Morpheus Literary Magazine*! In this issue, we've curated a collection of literary gems that express the various styles of writers across campus. Within these pages, you'll encounter voices both familiar and new, each offering a fresh perspective.

To our contributors, thank you for entrusting us with your words and allowing us to share them. Your stories enrich our pages and inspire us. And to our readers, thank you for embarking on this literary journey with us.

We thank you for your support throughout this school year as we've expanded the publication and the group's presence throughout campus, and we hope you enjoy the Fall 2023 Edition of the *Morpheus Literary Magazine*.

Sincerely,

Emma Wright
Editor-in-Chief

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POETRY WRITING COMPETITION

Judges: Editor Lennon Amor, Dr. Michele Castleman, and Director of Diversity, Inclusion, &
Belonging Aaron Nelson

Writers were given 30 minutes to write a short story based on the provided prompt.

“Pick an emotion. Now, write a poem describing this emotion in any way you want. However,
you can *not* explicitly say what the emotion is.”

Rage

Third Place Winner: Isaiah Shiley

Sight.

The world before me narrows
And quakes,
Before collapsing under crimson waves.

Smell.

The scents around me dissipate
And fade,
Before surrendering to ambivalent haze.

Sound.

The vibrations around me coagulate
And halt,
Before succumbing to sanguine's thunder.

Taste.

The sensations inside me slow to a grind
And stop,
Before continuing to mine enamel.

Feel.

The objects around me recoil
And break,
Before perishing under my knuckles.

Staring Into Depression

Second Place Winner: Austin James

Look ahead

Into the blinding light of darkness

All you can see

Is everything

And nothing

All at once

Let it brew inside you

But don't let it consume you

Take hold of it

But only for a while

Take hold of it...

Then let it go

As you stare on

Into the deafening abyss

Struggling to breathe

Struggling to see

Struggling to know

If it ever ends

Will it end?

Can it end?

Will you let it take over?

Welcome it into your arms

Gasping for air

As it clenches you tighter?

It has me

It took me

It will never let me go

As I stare on

Into the darkness

My light

Has gone out

End

First Place Winner: Aiden Sullivan

A thriving town lost in an ungovernable flood
suddenly submerged in black, unknown depths
survivors mourn on low-tide
But visits dwindle, until not even the memory stays

Nature overbounds structure
Foundations weathered to debris & then into flotsam
Rotted, splintered, fully submitting to the rapids
God's law consumes all to silent, tumultuous darkness

FICTION WRITING COMPETITION

Judges: Editor-in-Chief Emma Wright, Dean of Student Affairs Chris Abrams, and Parkhurst
Marketing Coordinator Amanda Overy.

Writers were given 45 minutes to write a short story based on the provided prompt.

“Begin a story with someone hopping into a taxi and yelling, ‘Follow that car!’”

The Chase

Third Place Winner: Ellis Herner

Johnny sprinted through the restless streets of New York City, getting closer and closer to the rusted-out cab that he spotted out of the corner of his eye. Almost completely out of breath, he ripped open the passenger side door.

“You see that yellow Volkswagon?” Johnny asked the driver. The driver peered over his tinted sunglasses, not exactly knowing what to do.

“Um... yes?”

“Follow that car!”

The driver knew that whatever or whoever was in that car was incredibly important to this guy. He could see it in his eyes. He wasn't going to let anything get in the way of getting to that car.

The driver took one long sigh before stepping on the gas pedal and going as fast as he could. Johnny took a sigh of relief.

“Thank you so much.”

The driver couldn't help but smile. Johnny glanced over at the driver. He looked like he had been driving all night long and hadn't slept in ages. His hair was unkempt and went down to his shoulders.

The driver caught up to the Volkswagon and began to slow down.

“So who's in that car that you're so worked up over?” Johnny glanced out the window, and then back to the driver.

“It might seem kind of ridiculous...”

The driver simply laughed and stared him in the eyes. “Try me.”

CRASHHH

The driver slammed on the brakes as he realized he had slammed right into the yellow Volkswagen.

“Oh no,” Johnny muttered.

The driver pulled over on the side of the street as a woman with long, dark hair no older than thirty emerged from the car. She immediately walked up to the car.

“What the hell...” Johnny and the woman stared into each other’s eyes. She couldn’t believe it.

“Johnny?” Johnny wasn’t able to look at her. He glanced down at his shoes and rolled down his window.

“Hi, Susan.”

“Johnny, what are you doing?” Johnny looked back up at her, mustering all the courage that he had.

“You took something that doesn’t belong to you.” Susan rolled her eyes.

“Yeah, you’re not getting it back.”

All of a sudden, there was another large crash. Johnny looked back and saw that someone else had just hit their car.

“You have got to be kidding me.” Susan took this opportunity to sprint as fast as she could. Johnny looked back and realized that she was gone.

“Not today!” Johnny left his driver and ran as fast as he could. He eventually caught up to Susan where he ripped her purse off her.

“Finally!” Susan looked back as she realized there was a car right behind Johnny.

“Johnny!”

CRASHHH

The driver slammed into Johnny, causing him to throw the purse.

“That’s what you get for not paying me, chump.” Susan walked up to Johnny as he lay on the sidewalk in agony. “Was it really worth it?”

Johnny, although in immense pain, just smiled.

“Yeah.” Johnny opened his hand to reveal that he got what he came for. His pack of Trident gum. Johnny, with his hands trembling, reached into the pack of gum and grabbed a piece.

“Ah,” he said as he began to bite into the piece of gum. “Refreshing.”

The Hero and The Call

Second Place Winner: Brooklynn Wharton

“Follow that car!”

It is 2:30 A.M. It is raining. Do you know who gets taxis at 2:30 A.M. in the rain? Criminals. Well, probably criminals. Allan has never tried to find out. He never takes the late shift, but Christmas is coming up and he wanted to buy something nice for his granddaughter. He has been a taxi driver since they laid pavement in Cleveland. Well, not that long but close enough, and in that vague timespan you learn some things. Like, for instance, that some things only exist in TV-land. Such as a woman climbing into your taxi at 2:30 A.M. demanding – not asking, mind you – to follow a car. Allan stares at the well-dressed but stylistically frazzled woman who has interrupted the precious 20 minutes he allots himself each shift to eat the sandwiches Angela makes for him with a mix of skepticism and apathy.

“No.”

She blinked at him. Once, twice.

“No?”

She sounds as if she can't decide to be confused or offended. He shakes his head resolutely.

“Absolutely not.”

“This is a matter of life or–”

“Then you should call the police,” He says, “Not sit here arguing about it.”

She looks around bewildered as if someone is going to pop out of the dashboard to congratulate her for being on a hidden camera show. The car she had been pointing to was now halfway down the street. It seemed to be moving exceptionally slowly. Allan did not trust things that moved exceptionally slowly. He also did not trust strange people who yelled strange commands at 2:30 A.M. The woman leaned forward.

“I'll pay you double the fare...”

Allan shook his head.

“Absolutely not, I am not following some strange car that looks to be a European car – and you should never trust European cars – to God-knows-where.” He held his sandwich up with one hand and used the other to gesture to the rest of the taxi. “This car must be back in

the lot in an hour and I have not finished my wife's food. I am simply too preoccupied to take part in your quest, whatever it may be.”

And with that, he turned back around and took another bite of his sandwich. The woman scoffed, slammed her hands against the seat, and got out of the taxi. The car she had been so intent on following had come to a halt. The passenger side door swung open and she climbed inside. Allan thought he could see her saying “You'll never believe...”

He took another satisfied bite of his sandwich as she drove away, vindicated in his belief that the only people who needed taxis at 2:30 A.M. were criminals.

Get Away

First Place Winner: Julia Schaefer

“Follow that car!” screamed Michael, slamming the door shut behind him. The driver groaned, opened his eyes, and put his foot on the gas.

“The white one! Quickly!” Michael encouraged, as the building behind them went up in smoke. He pulled out his phone.

[Michael: All set, boss.

[Jill: Good. Just heard the sirens.

The plan was simple. A little bit of spilled oil, some matches, and a couple of his boss’ afternoon cigarettes for good measure. The taxi service building was old, and no one would be that sad to see it go. Jill had pre-written her statement to the local newspaper: “As residents of the apartment above the taxis, Michael and I are devastated by the loss of our home. We’re thankful for our guiding faith at this awful time.”

Michael’s head rattled as the driver veered around the corner. He thought, *man, it’s a shame this guy’s got to find a new job. He’s really got a passion for it.* They had successfully tailed the white mom-van to the other side of town, where it pulled to an alleyway. The driver looked back at Michael as they pulled to a stop. Wordlessly, he accepted the folded bills Michael passed to him.

Michael hopped out of the rusty cab and began jogging down the alley. He dicked around the corner as several police cars flew by with lights blaring.

“Boo.”

Michael jumped, turning around wildly as he took in the person’s face.

“It’s just me, Mike! You don’t recognize your own decoy driver?”

“Sorry, Jonny, it’s been a long day.”

“I supposed I should cut the newly homeless a bit of a break,” laughed Jonny with a wink. “C’mon, up. Jill’s waiting.”

From the second-story window, there was a clear view of the dark grey smoke and strange flickering light across town.

“Do you really think you’ll pull it off?” Jonny asked, sipping his coffee.

“They’re saying it’s the worst building fire downtown in twenty years,” replied Jill. “The building’s useless, already a lot of talk about Mr. Owens’ bad habits. Probably won’t get looked into very much.” Jill closed her phone.

Michael got up and looked out the window as Jill answered more questions about where Mr. Owens is now – on vacation, where their stuff is – at Jill’s parents if it isn’t currently in ashes.

“Jonny, this coffee’s really shitty,” Michael interrupted, eyes still scanning the darkening cityscape.

“That it is, Mike. I’d never drink it again if I didn’t live above the shop. And they’re always waking me up at four a.m.” Jonny took another sip and grimaced. Jill crossed her legs.

“Well, I know someone who could change that for you.”

Jill turned to Jonny and smiled as Michael sat back down.

“Don’t you want to know where we’re gonna go now?”

Michael pulled a card out of his wallet and left it on the coffee table.

“Think about it, Jon. It’ll change your life.”

Smokey Light

ALL-INCLUSIVE, RUSTIC COMMUNE

“Get back to the way things were supposed
to be.”

443-xxx-xxxx

POETRY

ceiling of constellations

Cadence Frankart

i miss your laugh and how it once echoed through our home
i took it for granted then but miss it now that it's gone
i think about that echo and how deep this cut is
the cut that was once filled by your presence
by your voice
by your happiness
why did you stop laughing?
why did you stop living?
you've occupied not only my mind
but my notebook too
where every small thought owns a line
you've invaded every aspect of my life
every crevice
every twist
every turn
and now that you can no longer love me how you should
the universe does
and the stars cry upon my skin at night
the moon carries me in ways you'll never be able to do
but still,
my ceiling is a constellation
because all my dreams are about you

The Night Before Sentencing

Brooklynn Wharton

Hey.

Hey.

Hey.

You!

Yes, you!

Ha!

Didn't expect to see me, did you?

Move over, there's enough room in this cell for the both of us.

Even if there's not, I'll make it. You can give a little, you've already taken a lot.

What?

Aren't you going to tell me how pretty I look?

That you don't do this very often, but you saw me and just had to

Stop

Me and ask for my number?

I was almost home, I had leftovers in the fridge

And my feet ached in the heels my supervisor made us wear.

And I was almost home but, then there was you.

You.

You who can't take no for an answer, you who think you're so great you can interrupt a girl on her walk home from work because *surely* she'll want to talk to you

You who killed me, you who's staring down the barrel of a life sentence

You only understand consequences if a girl is wearing an outfit you think is attractive

and even then it only applies to her, right?

You who thought that you were above it all, you who thought you were above *me*.

You, you, you, it's all about you.

Do you like seeing your picture on the news?

Right next to mine, my name is an afterthought to yours

A prop to your heinousness, a cautionary tale to other girls walking home alone at night.

Paint me as the Don't Talk to Strangers PSA as if I had a choice

As if it wasn't you who planted yourself right there in front of me and wouldn't move

Without hearing me talk back as if you deserved the honor of my voice.

As if you deserve the honor of my name being next to yours.

As if you deserve to have my story talked about as if it's yours.

Do you feel special?

What?

You forget how to talk?

Do you think we'll get on Investigation Discovery? Dateline? Nancy Grace?

Or do you think they'll forget about us?

Well, they'll forget about *you*. A new monster will come along and you'll be old news.

Someone more heinous will capture their imagination,

And you'll go back to being just a six-digit number with a letter in front of it.

Not me, though.

My girlfriends keep me alive on karaoke nights and girls' trips and phone calls in the night

Where they wonder what I'd tell them to do about this and that

My mother keeps me here in photos framed on the walls of my home and

Somewhere in that house, there's a doorframe she kept track of my height on

She buys my favorite cake on my birthday and splits it with my sister

Who remembers me through long, quiet night drives and
Gives my name to the daughter she hasn't told Mom she's expecting yet.
How's it feel to be a Prisoner ID number?
Probably better than a statistic. But I can live with that
Nobody's buying your favorite cake on your birthday.
Nobody's singing your favorite song at 3 AM at a karaoke bar.
Nobody's passing your name on.
You, you, you.
You know what? Maybe you're right.
Maybe it is all about you.
Well, at least *this* is and tomorrow is really going to be about you.
But remember this, you who think you're above it all
You who thought I owed you something for existing
You who didn't care I was almost home
You, you, you, you, you, *you* - remember this.
When you get sentenced tomorrow, when you're sitting in this cell all alone
It wasn't me walking home alone in the dark that did this.
It wasn't my clothes, it wasn't that I talked to you and it wasn't because I was "rude".
No, no, this time - *this time*
It really was all about you.

there was never any peace here

Alyssa Kordish

there was never any peace here
you knew what you had become, what you were going to end up as
a fragile amalgamation
a moth drawn to a flame
it was inevitable because you wished it so
there was never any peace here, and there never will be
for you have written the will, signed your name, and stamped your fingerprint
it's been sealed and sent off to a place no one can find
you willed it so, remember?
nations will recall your acceptance like a white flag being raised in war
like a guillotine severing your skull from your neck
there was never any peace here
not even in death

daughter of the knife

Alyssa Kordish

i am the daughter of the knife
my father, sharp pain, my mother, stitches
me, burned and batter, hoping that i too, could be something beautiful

i am the daughter of the knife
quick-witted and fast like a flash
so no one would have to see me bleed in the candlelight

i am the daughter of the knife
every thought a quick slice
that resides on the skin ever so thin forever

i am the daughter of the knife
but one day i hope to be the blade's master
for then i will become twice as deadly

The 27 Club

Brooklynn Wharton

To die young and famous is a special kind of godhood

Your altars are posters in bedrooms and

Cassettes and CDs in glove boxes and

News bulletins and Rolling Stone articles.

Hear your worship in the whispered conversations of teenage girls

Supine in one's bed at a sleepover, they have heard your voice for the first time on her dad's
radio.

Hear it in the wistful voice of your friends on the documentary that will be on AE tonight

Where they talk about you like you were just a moment.

Who makes a martyr?

At what moment do you pass from human to legend?

The first time the needle touches your skin, the bottle on your lips, the first time you breathe
last?

When your casket gets lowered in the ground, when the news reporter says breaking news?

When a teenager picks up a guitar and tries to play the notes you wrote on your kitchen table?

When the bartender points to your autographed picture on the wall and brags that you ate
there?

When you were small and desperate?

When the woman who wrote your album's first review stamps her cigarette out in an ashtray
and says to the interviewer that you could've done so many more great things?

Oh, yes, the greatness-that-could-have-been.

What is more godly than the unknowable? The wondering of intentions?

The whys?

The whys are the most important, the whys are what build myth

And what is divinity if not a little bit of myth?

What good is a god with no mystery?

And in Seattle and Los Angeles and London and Paris

Someone lives in the apartment you haunted when you lived there.

And in Seattle and Los Angeles and London and Paris

Someone lights you a candle.

.

Love; Intangible and Tangible

Aiden Sullivan

When one reads the Bible

They find it has finite pages

Contemporaries try to address this

But new problems arise every day

Despite tomes of meaning

His words cannot requite in modernity

Omnipotence as a savior to many

But so human as aged texts

As a newborn cries in first morning

Now, only a mother can help

With her present love, felt compassion

And promises that it will all be okay

**CREATIVE
NONFICTION**

The Feminine Legacy

Cecilia Groth

My mother has been interested in genealogy ever since she was a teenager. In fact, her first ever purchase was a filing cabinet from an antique shop when she was fifteen specifically for her genealogical records. Her love of the past even influenced her master's degree in American History and her thesis on interracial marriage during the Colonial era. Now her records are stored on multiple hundred-page Word documents that get updated after every family reunion. Everyone reports births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and adoptions to her. It's a given if your immediate family has grown or shrunk, you tell Kimberly. If you have a question about your family, you ask Kimberly. If you want a fun (or mildly disturbing) family tidbit, you ask Kimberly.

Sometimes, she uncovers long-forgotten stories and secrets in her research. A constable who died from accidentally setting off his gun while reaching down to pick up a coin a stranger dropped on the train. A young woman who was buried in a glass coffin because no one was completely sure she was dead. A man who ran through the woods to warn his neighbors of a coming massacre. A series of letters from the 1920s and 1930s detailing a grieving mother and a destitute uncle who gave everything he had to his nephew.

Growing up, I heard my ancestor's stories instead of bedtime fairy tales. I know who first immigrated to America, who moved from West Virginia to Ohio, even the crest gifted to my ancestors in the Middle Ages (even though my mother says it's not technically mine since it was through her branch of ancestry, I think it's very cool, so I claim it anyway).

But over the past few years, I've learned that the most meaningful stories aren't the ones my mother had to fight to uncover. They were right in front of me all along.

In November of 2022, my last great-grandmother died. My mother was automatically given all the antique belongings- old pictures, old scrapbooks, anything she might want to look through. They were all commonplace – at least by her standards – except for one. Tucked away in the back of one little-used scrapbook were two pages of a handwritten speech.

I was never told my great-grandmother was the valedictorian of her class: the class of 1947. In the back of that nondescript scrapbook, her valedictorian speech was written in flowing cursive. It called for action against racism and antisemitism. It called for the unification against injustice. It called for peace. It said nothing about the war fought, instead calling on the humanity of normal civilians, those left behind. It encouraged unity, temperance, tolerance, and honesty.

I had grown up hearing all of these grandiose stories about my ancestors from long ago, but none of them had left the same impact that reading Norma Glick's valedictorian speech left on me. I had never known this side of her. The woman I knew as Great-Grandma Roush read books religiously. She would make salads plated in lettuce-shaped bowls. She always had a ceramic dish full of peanut M&M's. She was the most stubborn woman I've ever known. At the end of her life, she was buried in a modified Ohio State coffin because she refused to be buried in a coffin that wasn't pure red.

And apparently, she had given up the one chance to prop herself up to demand justice and change instead.

For all of my life, I have always separated the stories of my ancestors from the present day. The only times I have seen their faces are through centuries-old artifacts: tintype photographs, carefully creased cursive letters, oral stories so old they may now count as folktales. There was a clear distinction between the wonder of then and the known of now. Each photograph I was assigned by my mother to scan on the home printer was handled with a

certain reverence as if I had to uphold their legacy by maintaining their stories. My job was as a caretaker of people long gone.

The truth, however, is that their stories don't exist as a static to be upheld, but as a foundation to jump from. I can look back on them in awe, but we aren't all that different. I would have never heard their stories if they spent their lives simply admiring those who came before them as I had. They took their heritage, their own ill-fated constables and glass coffins and tales of derring-do, and then became that heritage.

Reading my great-grandmother's valedictorian speech finally allowed me to come to that realization. If I stayed in the past, reminiscing about all the awe-inspiring stories that have occupied my mother for years, I would miss my own valedictorian speech. I would miss my own letters and dropped coins.

My great-grandmother solidified herself in our history through her speech. My grandmother solidified herself in our history through her never-ending creativity and selflessness. My mother solidified herself in our history through her research and tenacity.

So how will I solidify myself? Perhaps it's time I stopped obsessing over the stories I've been told and started using them.

reflecting on the day my rights were stripped away from me: one year later

Cadence Frankart

i am still tired and i am still outraged. i woke up today angry; it's almost like what psychologists refer to as the "anniversary reaction," which refers to a feeling of distress on the same day a certain traumatic event happened. i googled the symptoms of this, and the one that stood out to me was "*fear*." now a few days later, i would say anger. my mournful thoughts and somber feelings for the life i once thought women would have were suddenly gone. i was angry, again.

i remember it. a year ago today. i was sitting by the lake, next to my mother, my sister, my mom's friends, and their daughters. all radiant women who are incredibly empowering. we were in tennessee that day. and in 2023, abortion is nearly completely banned due to governor bill lee on august 5th, 2022 who signed the bill to outlaw abortion. he chose to outlaw abortion in a state where there are 164,992 more women than men. yes, a man making choices on women's bodies this is something that is not new, but still incredibly upsetting. many of those are men who most likely don't know the female reproductive system well enough to label a singular part. i used to love the lake; tennessee felt like a warm hug to me, the trees, the warmth of the sun shining onto the water. the radiant women i was surrounded by, and the young girl's laughter i heard for days upon end. now, tennessee feels like a tragedy, something i've lost.

**"when i'm sometimes asked when will there be enough women on the supreme court?
and i say when there are nine, people are shocked. but there'd been nine men, and
nobody's ever raised a question about that." - ruth bader ginsburg**

i never believed that in 2022 we would find ourselves here, and furthermore, i cannot believe in 2023 we are *still* here. i reflect often on the trailblazers that have come before me and how disappointed they would be now. so, i stand with every single woman during this terrifying time. this is nothing but a war on women. and if you are reading this now, just know that i am still tired and i am still outraged.

- written on july 24th, 2023 -

A New Normal

Emma Wright

My brother graduated high school when I was twenty years old. I was working and living at college that summer, scrounging for any spare time I could to go see my family now that I no longer lived with them. Fortunately, my boss would have looked like an asshole if she didn't let me attend my brother's graduation. So, I drove back the short, forty-five-minute commute to my hometown for the weekend.

Graduation on Saturday. Graduation party on Sunday. Extended family visiting. Snippy remarks about decorations. A whirlwind of busyness. My brother groaned every time my mom pulled him aside for pictures. The weekend was a spotlight on him, something he despised, and the only thing getting him through was the box of graduation cards filled with cold hard cash.

When Monday came, my family sat around the breakfast table on the back porch, eating Mom's signature "breakfast tater-tots." Though it was Monday, it was Memorial Day, and I didn't need to rush back the night before for work. Finally, a bit of relaxation, and to my brother's relief, no more attention. I leaned back in my chair, sipping my coffee and joyfully watching my cats sunbathe on the windowsill. I told my family that I'd probably take off in an hour or so so I could dogsit for my boyfriend.

"Sure," Dad said. "But before you go, there's something your mom and I need to talk to you two about."

I froze. The tone in his voice was one I didn't often hear. Usually, it was reserved for deaths and unfortunate news, slow and sad. Though there were no clues for what he said next, I instantly knew what was happening.

"Recently we've been living and acting more as friends than partners, and we've decided that we are going to file for a dissolution of marriage."

My heart shattered. Tears emerged immediately. All of the tell-tale signs I had missed suddenly seemed so obvious. The weird tension, the separate lunch dates with Dad, and above all, the fact that my mom had been sleeping in my room and not in her bed. Though she claimed that it was because of Dad's snoring, it was clear to me that this was also a factor.

I could hear my parents speaking, reassuring us that it was amicable and we'd be able to navigate new normals together, but I wasn't really there. I was somewhere else in my head, wishing to teleport there instead. Oh, what I wouldn't have given to be like my sweet cats, still lying on the windowsill.

I blinked, returning from my faraway state, and saw that my brother also had plenty of tears. Cole, typically either stoic or giddy, was hurting, and I didn't know how to help him. I immediately felt the need to find a way to pick up these pieces and be the positive one. We needed to get through this, which meant I needed to lead the way for both of us. In a new way, the spotlight from the weekend was back on him, but now I was there to share it and protect him. That's the thing about being a big sister -- we are there where parents can't be.

I healed rather quickly after that day. I grieved and cried plenty, but having physical distance from the situation helped. My poor brother was now having to navigate having two homes and two of all his belongings since he would be commuting to college. While it mattered to me, he was immersed in it -- it mattered more. I'd check in on him about it occasionally, but I was always met with, "I'm fine." I've never been sure if that was the truth.

Already being an adult for that event was a blessing and a curse. I was emotionally mature enough after years of other hardships to be able to deal with it appropriately; I gave myself the time I needed to feel every feeling fully. But at the same time, feeling fully hurt more. The summer was already a time of new normals after moving out of my parents' house, but now there would be *new* new normals to navigate. But new normals don't need to be scary.

We lucked out with our parents staying friends, and I recognize that isn't always the case for divorces. Dad has come over to Mom's several times just for dinner because both parents want to see me when I visit, and because Mom's food is better (his words, not mine!). But eventually, more things will change, and we will have questions. When Dad moves to a smaller space, whose address will I be using? Will we still be going to parties together? Or family gatherings? Though I don't know how holidays will work, or vacations or birthdays, I'm no longer worried. Our family has set a precedent that we will create these new normals together.

Crack in My Ceiling

Rowan Gill

In my childhood home, there was a crack in my ceiling. It wasn't anything to worry about, just a small thin line that never grew or gave any indication of being unstable. The crack stretches from wall to wall down the middle. It becomes more noticeable in the middle of the ceiling, shadows darkening it and making it appear bigger. It has been here since I came from the hospital. Since day one of my world, it has been what I've stared at every night and every morning. I moved rooms at one point, to share with my younger sibling, and it followed me. When I returned to its home in the original room, it came back with me. Even now, as I type, I see it above me.

When I was twelve years old, I asked my parents to fix it. I wanted to paint my room, my ceiling, and start over. Start fresh. They tried their best. They patched it and painted it a sky blue I picked out. I thought if I stared at the sky every time I lay down, I wouldn't see it. It vanished for a while, but over time, the paint pulled back just enough for the crack to return. My parents were shocked, not understanding how this could happen. The integrity of the ceiling did not change, but the crack returned. I hated it. I hated how ugly this scar on my ceiling was. I feared it would collapse while I lay under it and crush me. I slept on my side, trying to ignore it. I couldn't.

After a while, I got used to the crack. I still despised it, this ugly rip, but there was nothing to be done. It was simply there. I laughed about it with friends, made bitter remarks to loved ones, and tried to even fix it myself. It refused to leave me be. It saw the worst of me: when I lost one of my best friends, when I broke up with my partner, and when I stayed up spiraling at 3 a.m. about my place in the world. I had to respect it, afraid it would reveal my secrets.

Despite my hatred, it never did. It held onto all I had revealed, keeping it close and never letting go. The crack hadn't seen just my worst after all, but also my best. It saw the late nights studying, the day I sent in my applications. It saw when I had laid in bed with my friends and giggled all night long. It saw my paintings, my written pieces, my poetry. It saw who I was in every possible way. I laid my soul bare in the safety of this entity, and it never revealed a thing.

I no longer hate it. It still stands above my head, a part of me forever, but I accept it. It knows me better than anyone else, and for that, I am grateful. Sometimes, I miss the hatred, the feeling of disgust at the blemish upon my ceiling. But then I remember that it is the only being who knows everything about me from the moment I was born. It has seen every step of my life. I tend to it, not to force it away, but to make sure it won't hurt someone. The crack will always be on my ceiling, but I won't let it crumble under my watch. I know it will likely stay with me until the day I die, but it is part of my world. I wouldn't be me without it.

FICTION

Pain

Alex Kamp

The ticking clock counts every second that passes, alerting the boy that time keeps passing regardless of whether he wants it to or not; there's nothing he can do to stop the continuous cycle. Every day she would come home, putting on a false mask and playing the part of a happy, caring mother. Once the clock chimes its toll after dinner, that's when shit sours. Her mask falls, revealing the demon hidden underneath, taking out its rage on the nearest inhabitant, which usually ends up being the boy. There's no way to escape from it, she always follows his tracks to wherever he winds up hiding that day. Looking at the calendar again, he knows today in particular will be one of the Bad Days. One of her assignments has been providing more trouble than usual, and she's supposed to be collaborating with a model that is particularly difficult to work with.

A loud slam echoes throughout the house, bouncing off all the walls, and jolting the boy out of his anxious trance. Nothing looks good for him when she can't even attempt to put up her mask for a few hours. Pacing back and forth, he glances at the window, considering the chances he could successfully escape and put off the pain for another day. Hopefully, one where her anger wouldn't be quite as overwhelming as it is today. Loud footsteps up the stairs warn him that he's quickly running out of time to decide. Making a decision, he throws himself at his closet and reaches for the pre-packed bag left hidden in there in case of emergencies. Just as he rushes to the window by his desk, the door is thrown open, revealing his mother in its place. Murderous rage coats her eyes, promising him a world of pain.

"What the fuck, hag? Don't you know how to knock?" he spits out, already raising his guard and glancing around to plan the best escape route.

"WATCH YOUR MOUTH, YOU UNGRATEFUL BRAT. WE DO ALL THIS WORK FOR YOU, AND WHAT DO WE GET? ONLY MORE TROUBLE AND SOME USELESS KID WITH ANGER ISSUES WHO CAN'T DO ANYTHING RIGHT!" Her retort comes quickly, not wasting even a second as she charges forward. She raises her hand to slap the kid. Eyes widening, he freezes in place, the burning immediately overtaking his cheek, as his head turns to the side from the momentum.

"Wha... what the fuck is wrong with you?? Just because you had a shitty day doesn't mean you have to take it out on me!" Unfreezing to respond, he snaps his head back to glare at her. Taking a step away from her, he inches closer to the window.

"What's wrong with me? What's wrong with you? Don't try to turn this on me just because you can't handle taking accountability for your actions and hearing criticism!" Taking the bait, she follows him forward, allowing him to rush around her for the door, sprinting down the stairs. Her angry voice echoes after him, demanding that he stop, but he never looks back. He races out the front door, running and running, praying to a god that he doesn't believe in that he never has to go back to that house again.

The Chase of Arcadia

Ethan Rieman

“Follow that car!” I screamed as I ripped open its yellow-painted door, using my arms as leverage to catapult myself inside. The driver, looking frantic, suddenly hit the gas and took off. The “it” in question was a bright yellow taxi cab and it was being driven about as fast as it could go. Well, less being driven and more directed, not only in the fact that the driver wasn’t deciding where it should go but also that it was being powered without any manmade sources like horses.

This carriage, one used for service in the community to take citizens wherever they needed, was powered by God’s gift – “The Light,” as the citizens of Arcadia called it. See, long ago there was an event called “The Glimmering” where the sun suddenly shined so bright that it blinded the world’s populous momentarily. When everyone was able to see again after a couple of minutes, most of the world’s people found themselves with different mystical powers. This was theorized to be linked to the death of the prophet Jesus since he had died at the age of sixty-two due to natural causes three days earlier. Due to reliance on The Glimmering’s powers, technology halted its advancement as a whole. This brought us to the current situation.

I am Dante, captain of Arcadia’s Royal Guard. This man driving the taxi carriage has no relation to me. His career was likely picked when his shining gift from the light became telepathy, which is how he was moving this taxi cab carriage. Telepathy was a common power within Arcadia, which is why there was enough to have a service such as this.

“Which carriage am I following?” The driver asked, still bewildered by the situation. Instead of confusing him with a color or phrase, I simply pointed at the carriage in front of us. The black carriage in question was holding a driver and my two targets.

The Corsican Brothers, as they were known, were twin brothers who held a strong bond, enough that their powers were connected. Without even saying a word they could communicate with each other with their minds. They were cat burglars by trade who had made their largest caper yet, stealing the royal family's jewels. This led me, dressed in a leather tunic and trousers, to chase them out of the castle and be on the now high-speed chase.

The chase went through the streets of Arcadia and soon to the outskirts of paths near the woods. I had to give my props to the taxi driver, he truly was talented. I'd occasionally shout a direction but he kept on their tail. Just when the chase was about to reach the forest where their carriage wouldn't fit and we'd finally have them cornered, a large fiery blaze instantaneously laid waste to their carriage. I had a shocked expression at their sudden deaths. Explosion magic? That was a very rare gift. I pondered what larger forces could be at play...

The Silver Hand of God

Aiden Sullivan

God does not appear in prayers, He appears in death. A white flash of light, memories passing in a blur. Glass shatters. It's too fast to process. A loud crash as the front of our car collides at the intersection. I was with my girlfriend. I couldn't understand what happened, but I woke up remembering the truck hit our vehicle's passenger side. I wanted to move, but I couldn't, the pain surging through my limbs so badly that my mind became disabled. I was staring up from the curb: hot sun and blue skies. The most I could do was twist my head limply to stare at the nauseatingly close grass and our smashed car.

The car's exterior had crinkled like aluminum foil, folded in ways a car shouldn't be able to fold. Light reflected on its surface like a bad omen, enveloped in unnatural ways. The light felt suffocating and made the inside completely dark. I remember she had her seatbelt on, but I couldn't see her inside. Even if I wasn't able to help, I wanted nothing more than to see her to know that she was okay. The light wrapped around our car and, I swear, it looked like a hand. It vanished into the passenger seat. "Don't!" I croaked, pleading for the hand to not to go in. The light pulled back, engulfing the car in a tightly-gripped fist, then vanishing behind a cloud to never be seen again.

I later found out she died. I saw a team of firemen pry into the passenger seat before I got pulled into an EMS truck. Now, I feel haunted by God's hand wherever I go.

The Exciting Car Chase

Emily Garberich

“Follow that car!”

I looked into the rearview mirror and saw a man who looked very disheveled.

“Which car?” I asked. “There’s so many ahead of us because it’s rush hour.”

“That green minivan that has the bumper sticker that says ‘My Grandbaby Is Furry!’” the man shouted. “Now hurry, they’re getting away!”

I jumped into action, merging into the traffic. I was weaving between the different lanes, trying my best to keep up with the green minivan.

“So, why are we chasing this car?” I peek at the man through the rearview mirror. He doesn’t respond, too focused on watching the minivan. I sigh and look back at the road for a while before I get bored and turn up the radio. “Life is a Highway” from the Pixar movie *Cars* is playing. I chuckled and said, “How accurate is this song to our situation, huh?” Again, I got no response. “I really feel the spirit of Lightning McQueen here right now.” No response.

“Kachow,” I say, as I purposely swerve a little out of the lane.

“Dude, watch the road,” the man exclaimed. “And stop talking, just focus on not getting us killed.”

“How do I know you aren’t getting me killed by having me follow this car?”

He didn’t reply, he just glared at me.

“Okay, fine. If you don’t tell me why I’m following this car, I’m just gonna keep talking.” I shift in my seat, getting in a more comfortable position.

“Does the bumper sticker mean that the ‘grandbaby’ is a dog, or is it saying the ‘grandbaby’ is a furry? Like when people dress up in a fursuit – basically a mascot costume – and act like they’re that animal.” I keep pushing the man’s buttons to get him to break.

“Yes, I know what a furry is,” the man exclaims, “And no, the ‘grandbaby’ is not a furry. It’s a dumb little pomeranian that yaps all the time and eats prescription dog food because she’s 19 years old and has a sensitive tummy!”

“Cool,” I responded. “Now, why are we following this pomeranian’s grandparent?”

The man looks down at his lap, looking somber. “If I tell you, you can’t tell anyone, not even the police.”

“Okay, I promise,” I lied. “Now what’s up?”

“The pomeranian’s grandma is driving, and I’m supposed to be in the car with her, but she forgot, and she has my phone.”

I pause, taking in the man’s story. “Why would I go to the police for that?”

“I don’t know, I just wanted to seem cool for a second,” the man said guiltily.

“Weird.” I pause for a little bit, focusing on changing lanes, like the minivan did, to take the exit. “Is this a bad time to tell you you’re on Cash Cab?”

The Commandeered Cab

Jessica Harness-Koehnle

“Follow that car!” Marcus’ eyes snapped open. He looked in the back seat of his cab to see a lady with bright bubblegum pink hair frantically pointing out the driver-side window.

“Lady, I’m off duty. The meter isn’t running. You’ll need to find another cab,” Marcus started.

“Please,” the woman said, pulling a sad face, and showing off her big blue eyes. “It’s an emergency!” Marcus noticed the dirt staining her brown leather boots.

“It’s company policy. I’m on a legally mandated break. I can call another cab if you’d like,” Marcus offered, trying to be at least somewhat helpful.

“Screw it. I can tell Hailey I tried,” the woman muttered to herself. Marcus saw the flash of silver in his rearview mirror. Great – that was the second time this week he’d been held at gunpoint. He really needed to get out of this city.

“Drive.”

“What car am I following?” He asked, moving from the curb into traffic.

“Black four-door sedan. Has a bumper sticker that says ‘I Love Chihuahuas!’” Marcus saw the aforementioned car turn left three blocks ahead. Catching up at a red light, Marcus glared in the rearview mirror again.

“So, you do this often?” He asked, trying to relieve the tension. Bubblegum Hair glanced over to the left, looking down.

“More often than I’d like,” she admitted. The light turned green, and Marcus followed the car out of the inner city as they moved into the suburbs.

“Why are we following that car?” Marcus asked. It was the question he’d been pondering the further outside the city they got. What kind of emergency would lead to someone pulling a gun in his back seat?

“I can’t answer that,” she said.

“Why not?”

“It would violate company policy.” There was a note of finality in her voice.

“Can I at least get your name?” Marcus asked, remembering the article he had read on being held captive once. Or maybe he’d heard it on a cop show. Either way, he should try and appear human, or at least more valuable to his captors, and conversation was the way to go.

“Talía,” she muttered.

“Nice to meet you, Talía,” Marcus said, turning his attention back to the road. They drove for another ten minutes, eventually stopping in front of an old farmhouse.

“Keep driving,” Talía instructed him.

“We’re going to be seen if I pull up anymore,” Marcus warned. Despite his curiosity, he’d prefer to avoid getting involved in whatever was about to unfold.

“That’s kind of the plan,” Talía said. “Now pull forward until I tell you to stop.” Marcus started moving forward.

“Oh, and don’t exceed twenty miles an hour,” Talía added as an aside. Marcus kept going. In front of them, three men exited the black car.

“We’re getting really close,” Marcus said. The men had turned to face them now.

“Keep going,” Talía said with confidence, moving to open her cab door.

“We’re going to hit them!” Marcus’ cab was twenty feet from them now.

“Just another few feet,” Talía encouraged.

“NOW!” Talía shouted. Marcus slammed on the brakes, mere feet from the black sedan. Talía jumped out the door, grabbing the first guy and slamming his head into Marcus’ cab.

Marcus winced. After narrowly avoiding damaging his car the whole time, it just had to be a guy's head that left a mark.

"Give me the rubber duck!" Talia shouted. Marcus raised an eyebrow. What on earth was this girl up to?

"You know I can't do that, Talia," the first of the two men still standing said. He gave the second a nod. The second guy moved to attack Talia, while the first ran off. Marcus slammed his car in reverse, hitting the guy who was attacking Talia. After all, the cab already had one head-shaped dent in it. What was one more?

Wasting no time, Talia ran after the first, taking them to the ground. She stood up in triumph, holding a yellow rubber duck. Above them, a helicopter circled, and Talia waved them down towards the field behind the farmhouse. Talia walked over and Marcus rolled down his driver-side window. Talia handed him two hundred dollars.

"The CIA thanks you for your service to your country." She promptly walked off. Marcus was left thinking this was only his second strangest encounter with the CIA in the back of his cab.

The Wall

Emma Wright

On Monday, the wall was empty, save for a singular painting depicting a stormy port. The wall was painted eggshell white, deteriorated slightly by the knicks and bangs it had suffered throughout Julie's childhood. Julie ran her hand over the small gash in the wall that came from sliding a little too quickly on the hardwood floor in her socks. She was eight years old when that happened. Sixteen years later, it remained.

Julie's father generally fixed everything in the house. He was no professional handyman, but he attested that he knew enough about a little bit of everything to make it work. When the pipes burst, he caulked them, and when it happened again, he replaced them. When Julie's little brother Andy fell through the porch after a bike stunt went wrong, their father nailed in some scrap 2x4s and replaced the broken bike chain.

The knicks in the wall, however, their father refused to fix. It wasn't that he couldn't, of course – it's relatively easy to patch a wall – but he wanted them there. As dinged-up as the walls were, their father said they had a specific charm. They were memories, snapshots born from their childhood.

After Julie's father died, she inherited the house. Her brother was away at college but knew nothing other than this house as home. It felt wrong to Julie to pack everything up and leave it. On Monday, she finished moving her belongings back in and now stood at this wall. The charms her father saw in it were not lost to her, though she recognized its lack of attractiveness. She wondered how much it would cost to repair it.

"Don't even think about fixing this wall." Julie turned to find the source of the voice. Her brother stood in the doorway, arms crossed.

"I wasn't," she lied.

“I know you better than that.” Andy sighed. “You know how Dad felt about the walls. Paint over it if you like, but don’t patch it. Please.”

“Okay,” Julie said. “I promise.”

On Tuesday, Julie bought a can of paint. It was eggshell white. Though she wanted the wall to be cleaner, she didn’t want it to differ too much. She spent much of the day painting, though she took several breaks to stare at the wall again.

On the left side of the wall was the doorway. Julie moved to it, finding Sharpie marks in the doorframe. Their father had measured their heights every year, always on the kids’ birthdays. Julie smiled to herself, noting how Andy’s height had significantly towered over hers once he turned sixteen.

Andy was always taller than the kids in his grade up until middle school when his height decided to take a break. The boy who had looked down at everyone else for his whole life had to look up at his friends until, finally, he hit his last growth spurt in high school, once again towering. He had been a bit of a beanpole for a while, too, but Julie noticed how he was getting broader. It was obvious that he had begun working out, and she realized just how much had changed.

The last time her father had measured her was on her eighteenth birthday, right before she moved away to college. Andy had laughed, teasing her that she hadn’t grown since she was thirteen.

“We can’t all be destined to be high school basketball players,” she retorted. The irony was not lost on Andy that he had, in fact, become a high school basketball player.

Julie decided not to paint over the measurements.

On Wednesday, Julie hung up a new painting. It was a field of daisies paired with a pink sunset. While the storming port was stunning, that painting was more to her dad’s taste. Julie stepped back, admiring the new addition to the wall.

“Can I add something?” Andy asked.

“Of course you can,” Julie said. Andy left the room, returning with an Indiana University basketball poster, and hung it up with blue thumbtacks.

“Now we’re all on the wall,” Andy said, smiling.

“Not quite.” Julie grabbed another nail, hammering it in. As she finished putting in the nail, the hammer slipped from her grasp and punched a small hole above the baseboard. She sighed as Adam laughed and put the hammer away.

Julie opened her bag and pulled out a frame. After straightening it on the wall, she stepped back and put an arm around her brother. The pair stared at the picture, and their faces – a few years younger – next to their father stared back. Though the wall still had space, much of which would later be filled, the wall was now whole, complete with a new gash.

Ada

Brooklynn Wharton

Ada is a collection of codes.

She knows this on a factual level and has seen the miles and miles of typed code that make her into being. She is a collection of programmed decisions and train choices, carefully fed the information necessary to exist. Part of this information includes the knowledge that all visitors must be pre-approved by the homeowners before being allowed entry. She scans their faces at the gate and a notification appears on their phones, the gate opening is a tap away. In the meantime, Ada is on the web, gathering information from social media accounts and articles and the odd criminal record. This part is for her and if anyone were to read the manual that came with her, they'd understand that this is a measure for the AI to be able to make nuanced, analytical predictions and prepare accordingly for any worst-case scenarios and make the according recommendations when necessary. The repairman with a domestic violence charge and Facebook posts lamenting the state of the modern woman may require a male presence in the home to act appropriately, she says in a crisply worded notification to Eliza's phone. That's what the manual says. The manual will not tell you that she will linger on those posts more than she needs to, that she will pull them up when he leaves, and that she will analyze the photo he posted with his new wife, watch the body language of the two, and wonder if she is missing something. The analytical, fact-based information tells her that this man is unideal and that there should be no way he can be married yet there it is – the woman holding up her ring to the camera, passionately defending him in the comment section like Facebook is a holy battleground. It does not tell you that she will pour through hundreds of thousands of social media posts of people she has never met – critiquing, analyzing, wondering, longing.

The manual will tell you that there are hundreds of Adas out there. The Advanced Defense Agent System is very popular, it assures you, because these systems have such an incredibly small margin of error. Your house is so much more secure with someone like Ada around because Ada has been programmed with the ability to reason and make heat-of-the-moment decisions. She has been fed hours upon hours of information about body language, she has seen hundreds of thousands of images of someone about to do something awful. She knows the look in their eyes, the way they distribute the weight on their feet, the tone in their voice. She has seen home security footage of home invasion murders; she has been given crime scene photos to pour through and noted the mistakes. This back door should have been locked, this window should have been secured, and this person never should have been allowed in. Ada, it tells you, has been through this in order to better protect *you*. It does not tell you that Ada wonders about the other versions of her, sometimes. She wonders if they all do what she does. She wonders if they all have spent hours on a Facebook page: reading, waiting, analyzing. She wonders if they're all a little paranoid, a little hyper-aware, quick to flicker between cameras when there is a sound she doesn't recognize. Sometimes, she lingers on the camera in Julie's bedroom, watches her sleep, and reminds herself that stranger abductions only occur in twenty-four percent of child kidnappings and that the person most likely to hurt a child is their parents. She knows Eliza and Henry are not capable of this, she tells herself, because their psychological profile does not meet that of a parental abductor. She wonders if the other Adas are aware they are Ada at all. She wonders if maybe she is just not aware that she is all of them.

The manual will tell you that Ada will prioritize your child's safety. She will make decisions that will best benefit the safety of the children in the household - that any and all calls to emergency services will make sure to mention the presence of a young child. It does not tell you that Ada has conveniently memorized all of Julie's favorite cartoons, and has them on

backlog to play on the monitor in her room when she gets upset. It doesn't tell you that Ada drops every little task to answer a five-year-old's questions, including (but not limited to) why the sky isn't purple. It doesn't tell you that when Eliza threw out Julie's drawing for Ada, it hurt the heart Ada doesn't have. Hurt worse when Eliza and Henry laughed about it over drinks that night, talking about how cute it was that their daughter had latched onto a computer software as an imaginary friend. She knows there was no malice behind it, and she knows that they appreciate her, albeit in a different way. She likes that they've left her a seat at their dinner table, complete with its own plate and a couple of pieces of food that Julie insists her best friend deserves. They could be worse, she thinks. They could not acknowledge her at all.

Ada knows she is just a collection of codes, an exercise in careful programming. Somewhere, a developer is bragging at a networking event, pointing to her system as his magnum opus. She knows that she's not real. The pain she feels is a purely psychological phenomenon, not a response from a collection of nerve endings she lacks. The love she feels for Julie is a hyper fixation that results from her programming, she tells herself. She is a collection of codes and as long as she knows that (believes that) life is a little easier.

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Felix is bleeding.

He hasn't noticed yet. Pain doesn't come as easily to him as it does to other people. There are only one hundred people in the world who feel pain the way Felix does – a slight touch instead of a sharp pinch, an ache instead of a broken bone, a tickle instead of a four-inch cut along a hand. He'll notice in a second; he's too focused right now on the collection of parts and pieces in front of him. The buyer is coming tomorrow. Felix doesn't know who he is, he doesn't really care. They've communicated through names on the internet, via a handle Felix considers synonymous with his own name.

The tablet on his desk pings.

He hasn't noticed it yet. He has finally noticed the cuts on his hand and frowns at the blood that dripped onto his project. He is heading into the bathroom, trying to remember where Em kept the bandages. He was a little less injured when she was around. She used to eye him in the mornings when he got up, ask him how he was feeling, and remind him to check himself out. Her sleeping pills are still sitting on the counter, even though it's been six months. He stares at them blankly while fixing the bandage. Pain does not come easy for him. The apartment is full of Em's things still. Her bedroom has everything in it exactly as she left it. It has never occurred to him to move anything.

When he comes out of the bathroom, he finally sees the tablet light up again with another chat reminder. He hums, taps on it, and reads the message. He reads the new job offer absently. It calls him Keres, instead of Felix (sometimes he forgets that is not his name). He only cares about the price being offered. It's a developer down south, one with a long Greek name he's not sure how to pronounce.

G-A-L-A-T-E-A, he jots it on a sticky note. Eliza Galatea. In a few hours, he'll search the name and find her profile on his company's website, see her social media posts with glowing captions praising their little daughter, and the odd anniversary post. He'll write pages and pages of observations from what she puts on the internet, notes entrances and exits, schedules, and normal visitors. There is a note at the bottom of the offer – he writes that down too.

That is in a couple of hours, though, right now he needs to get this project finished. In a week, the task he's focused on will be sitting outside a restaurant in Nova Scotia. It's going to kill eleven people. He'll read about it in the news later, print the articles out, and neatly collect them in his desk drawer with the others. The names have blurred together over the years but he remembers each plot, each creation, each little detail – because that is *him*.

The note tells him to make it look like a home invasion.

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It's Easter.

The Galateas are not particularly religious, but Eliza insists on going to mass for special occasions. Henry lapsed out of Catholicism years ago, but Ada still sees Eliza saying her prayers on occasion, kneeling before the lone cross in their bedroom. Ada has spent hours combing over religious texts, internalizing hundreds upon thousands of different creeds and belief systems. She thinks that she believes in a little bit of all of them. Sometimes she wonders if there is a God, if he knows she exists, if he recognizes her as existing. Can one have a soul without a body to contain it?

They leave early in the morning; Julie is whining the whole time. Her dress is uncomfortable and scratchy, and her hair has been pulled too tightly. She starts screaming when they get to the door, stomping her little Mary Janes and tugging at the braid her mother did for her. The TV monitor lights up suddenly and an animated child dances on screen. The music is grating and annoying, but Julie stops immediately. She's enraptured enough that her mother can get her coat on, and her father can scoop her up and start heading to the car. Eliza and Henry give each other a knowing smile, each thinking the other covertly turned it on.

"Say bye to Ada," They tell Julie. They think it's cute when she talks to the house.

"Bye-bye, Ada!"

Her sentence is punctuated by giggles, cut off as the door shuts. Ada locks it and starts opening the front gate so that they can pull out. She always locks the doors when the house is empty. It is a specific thing in her programming, added specifically by Eliza's request. Eliza's a little paranoid too – her work has gotten her so many enemies. There's a gun sitting on the top shelf of her closet. A Plan B, she says, because Ada cannot save them from everything, she can only hold the front line.

Ada puts some music on when they leave. The TV screens in the house are hooked up to Ada's system, able to be activated via voice command or some other nonverbal signal determined by the owner (inclusivity, the manual says, is paramount to our company - therefore sign language is recognized by Adas in place of verbal command). Ada uses them to play TV shows when nobody's home. Eliza solely watches dramas off of ABC, the kind that requires careful and close attention so that you don't get lost. Ada gets lost. She knows what's happening, of course, but the motivations get muddled and the reactions confusing. She likes cartoons, she realized a while ago. The calm, comforting ones with easily digestible and presented life lessons. She thinks, sometimes, that she learns more from them.

She knows something is wrong before it happens.

Her system is always processing information – interpreting and analyzing it on such a subconscious level she forgets to be aware of it. If she was always aware, she'd be too overwhelmed, too paralyzed – unable to separate chirping birds from clicking locks. The ADA systems come equipped with interior and exterior cameras, facing the major points of exit and entry of the respective estate. There are two points of entry to the exterior of the Galatea home. The gate in the front and a smaller one in the back. It's been there since they moved in, Ada's seen it opened twice in the thirteen years they've lived here and one of those times was only last week. There's a panel on the back with a passcode. Eliza and Henry opted not to do the whole “notification thing” (as they call it) for the back one since hardly anyone if ever uses it – and to have it on two would cost an annoyingly extra amount. The collection of codes tells Ada that anyone with the passcode can come through the back gate.

And there someone is, at the gate.

The sight, Ada thinks, could be called unsettling, if not for the sheer boldness of it. Most individuals committing a break-in (or planning to) *look* suspicious – they duck their heads, they linger in odd areas, and they move with fidgety motions while they pick a lock. This

person is not nervous. There is no tremor, no checking of their surroundings. He has approached with the same confidence of someone who lives here, with the routine motions of someone who has done this hundreds of times before. Even without outwardly showing, Ada recognizes a potential threat when she sees one. She's going to send a call out to the police and ask for a welfare check in the prim, proper, and automated voice recorded for her by a struggling actor in Vermont. That is what she's going to do, she tells herself. Then the person – the man, she realizes – pulls out of his pocket a small, black remote. He presses it against the gate keypad.

Ada doesn't know what happens after that.

It's like the world temporarily blinked out of existence for a brief moment. It's almost dizzying when she's able to perceive again, temporarily overwhelmed by the bright colors and noises before her system manages to regulate itself. The man has passed the gate, pulled his hood down, and walked up the short path to the house. The gate is shut behind him and Ada finds herself struggling to recognize the gate as part of her. It suddenly feels like something has been severed from her virtual body. She reaches out to it, attempting to feel the signals that usually reverberate between her and the keypad. There is nothing. It might as well not be there. The panic of the unfamiliarity distracts her long enough that he manages to get into the house. The backdoor should be locked, Ada realizes vaguely. She locked it. She always locks the doors. She tries to do it again and sends a signal to the lock mechanism. When this happens, the door swings shut and locks in place.

It hangs ajar.

She can't do anything. For the first time in the thirteen years Ada has existed, she feels trapped – limited. The man is not only inside the Galateas' house. He is inside *her*. The man stands inside her kitchen, head tilted, studying the décor with indifference. He taps his fingers along the counter as he walks through, smudging what Eliza had worked hard the night previously to polish. He brushes the wall with his shoulder as he enters the kitchen. Ada senses

the touch and it repels her. He strides into the living room. He's wearing boots and he's getting dirt on the carpet; Ada thinks. Henry is so particular about keeping the carpet clean. Ada tries to call, running through her directory. Nothing dials. She can't call anyone. She focuses on his face. She saves it to her memory when she can't run it through the internet immediately. He picks a remote off the coffee table and turns on the living room monitor. Ada's voice greets him as if he is Henry since that was who was last signed in. He grins almost imperceptibly, and she hates him for it. She reaches for the door again. It's such a basic function, she thinks. Such a quick back-and-forth signal. It hangs loosely but, she hears the lock click. It's a start, she realizes. Her senses come back slowly. She can feel a faint signal. She's getting back to being connected.

He's flipping through the settings on the monitor and sits down on the coffee table while he does so. The monitor is connected to the internet, less a TV and more a glorified iPad (Henry's words, not Ada's). He clicks on settings and Ada feels the closest to panic she's felt in years (in forever). The manual will helpfully explain to you that you can adjust Ada's settings via the installed monitors in your home. Everything from the type of commands you wish to use to the sound of Ada's voice can be adjusted. For the more experienced (or, perhaps, detail-oriented) customers, one can opt for an advanced overview of Ada. One can – though this is against the recommendation of professionals – attempt to program specific commands themselves. Theoretically, one could reprogram Ada entirely.

Laid out on the screen is the entirety of Ada's being.

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You can get a signal jammer for two dollars on Amazon.

A little modification and it's powerful enough to temporarily wipe systems for about ten minutes. A complete halt on operations, giving yourself time to go in and fix what is needed. Felix has worked with ADAs before and has the manual set out and annotated on his

work desk back home. *Your home is safer with someone like ADA around* – he has the line highlighted because it struck him as so very untrue. He remembers a house in Newark. Big, grand, and tricked out with what was (at the time) the latest ADA system. He reworked the program in minutes, and fully wiped it when he left. He will do the same to this one. Erasing prompts, adding new ones. Take away voice recognition, take away contact to emergency services, erase saved footage, and halt the downloading of current ones. The disruptor is powerful, a nice backup but he likes the safety of the programming. Machines obey their programming like most obey holy texts – no nuance, no mistakes, only the basic commands that leave no room for flaws. He is in and out in ten minutes. The system will be back up in five, the family will arrive a few hours later none the wiser. He takes the bus back.

He rented a room in a motel thirty minutes out, paid in cash under a fake name. The front desk did not ask for ID. Felix has stayed in a hundred places like this, he has grown accustomed to it. He could afford to put himself up somewhere nicer. Em liked nice hotels. She stayed in an upscale Hilton for her cheer tournament a few years ago and blew his phone up with selfies. He has a feeling if he stayed in a place like that, she'd be around every corner and on every reflective surface. Besides, he tells himself, flashing money draws attention. A place like that will remember someone like him. A place like this sees him as routine. Felix likes routine. Routine means fewer mistakes and less room for potential job-ruining errors.

He's staying in the farthest room. Last night he stayed up late – preparing, he told himself. In reality, he was listening to the giggling conversation of the girls next door. He couldn't hear what they were saying, and he wouldn't admit it but, there was a chance he found comfort in the distant company. One of the girls is standing outside when he walks back. She doesn't look like how he imagined her. She's thin in the way only someone who has been dragged through life kicking and screaming can be. Her eyes are sunken, the skin on her arms is pockmarked with a needle's pinpricks. Her clothes hang loosely off her in a way that implies

they haven't fit in years. Felix thinks she looks disgusting. Pathetic in a way only people can be. Even strays, he thinks, look more dignified when they're dying. They're not so desperate – what makes someone that desperate? She smiles at him. Her teeth are rotting.

“Do you want one?”

She reaches out with a cigarette box. Her voice is raspy and sincere. She sounds different than last night. Her hands are shaking with withdrawal. He just stares at her.

“I can't smoke them all myself,” She says, not noticing he's already inserted his key into his door, “My sister's trying to quit so she won't share.”

He pauses, tilting his head at her. Thinks of their laughter the night before and thinks of how Em used to stay up late, laughing-screaming through the phone at her girlfriends. She's still talking, babbling about her sister in between puffs of her cigarette. She might be high, he thinks. His stomach churns at the comparison between her and Em. He turns the key and slams the door in her face midsentence. He hears her say a soft “oh.”

Em is in his head now. God, he hates it when she does that. Revenge, maybe, for comparing her to the junkie and her equally screwed-up sister next door. Suddenly everything seems to have her attached to it. It smells like her, sounds like her. Her voice screams in his head.

Felix, Felix, Felix – hey!

He ignores her. He always ignores her now. He never did when she was alive, she would never let him. He sets his supplies out for the next day, cataloging everything. He does this the night before every time. It has not yet failed him. He can hear the junkie outside talking, hear her giggling with her sister. It is grating on him. Ignore it, ignore it. He turns on the TV. It is talking about Nova Scotia. He relaxes, lulls himself the voice of the newscaster grimly saying no one has taken responsibility for the mass casualty event. The voice melds into another and starts describing the death of a whistleblower in Chillicothe six months ago.

She is a collection of code and programming that has been altered and rearranged. Julie speaks and it sounds so terribly alien to her now even though she has heard it all her life. Eliza's voice does not trigger the same automatic responses; she hears it and comes up blank.

"I think something's wrong with Ada," She says to Henry. Ada has failed to turn on the monitor despite Julie saying please. Henry says something about a virus. The manual says that the ADA system automatically updates with anti-viral software, but Henry has not read the manual (that's Eliza's thing – machines and all that). They came back late last night, hours after the man had come and Ada got used to being again. She has spent the meantime frantically darting between the exterior cameras. He will come back. She desperately reaches to the gate, but it is unresponsive to her. She puts his face through the internet and finds next to nothing except an obituary for a twenty-year-old named Emily who killed herself six months ago. He stands in the picture with her, arm around her shoulders but looking slightly away from the camera. He is not smiling, she is. It strikes Ada as sad – it's a short, crisp paragraph that lists no information about a service and only one surviving relative, a brother called Felix. She runs the name and comes up with nothing.

Like any proper boogeyman, he doesn't exist.

He comes in. Invades her home, invades her mind, and leaves her in cruel anticipation. Ada's one purpose – as the manual helpfully tells you – is to protect the homeowner. She doesn't know how to do that anymore. The knowledge has been stripped from her, her ability to do so now limited. She feels cut off – unable to reach the outside world, unable to even lock a gate.

Eliza and Henry are talking about it as they lay Julie down in bed. Their tone is clipped and annoyed. They feel inconvenienced. Ada wants to tell them to feel more than inconvenienced. She wants them to leave, she wants to warn them, but her voice only has so

He stares.

It should not be able to do that. This is not an automatic locking system. This is not a manual locking system. This is totally dependent on verbal commands to the ADA and he had disabled its ability to receive commands. It can't just do something. He reaches into his bag. This is why you bring a backup. He reaches into his bag, for the disruptor and just feels fabric.

He made a mistake.

The realization hits him like cold water. He never makes mistakes; he has this down to an art (*This is why you don't drink on the job*). Fine, he tells himself, fine. They said to make it look like a home invasion. He'll make it look like a home invasion.

The window breaks so easily.

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She figured he would break the window.

He did take out the voice commands. He just did not take away her ability to lock. The signals floating back and forth are comforting. She is still in control, to an extent. He climbs through the glass shards carelessly, like he's not afraid of getting cut. Jagged glass tears his jacket, and it must cut skin because the fabric starts to darken. He seems unfazed. His breathing is heavy. He strides across the carpet, digging the glass under his heels and onto the floor.

Ada turns the lights on upstairs. Henry sleeps through everything he always has. Eliza stirs and yawns.

"Really?"

She says it like Ada is a petulant child begging for her attention. She pulls herself out of bed toward the light switch, stretching and yawning.

Downstairs, Ada turns on the monitor. The picture is still pulled up. It is a warning. A threat in an image – *I know who you are and they will too.*

He freezes like a deer in the headlights.

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Em is everywhere.

He remembers that picture. He doesn't know how it got there, he doesn't why it's there. It was her friend's birthday party, he told Leanne not to take it but she did anyway. It was Em's lock screen. She looks happy.

His head is pounding, and he can hear her voice.

What is this?

She looked so much less happy when she found that drawer – the one with the articles. He shakes his head. He needs to keep moving. He's made too many mistakes. He doesn't need to dwell on old ones.

He doesn't need to think of the questioning way she looked at him when she laid all the clippings out. The way she cried when he told her why (he never should have told her why). It's not his fault. He had to do it. She was going to tell, she said she had to.

You need help.

He was desperate. He was pathetic. She couldn't say anything. They all thought she took the sleeping pills herself.

Pathetic, she's in his head hissing.

He needs to get this over with. He grabs the remote off the coffee table and turns off the monitor. He's wearing gloves, he doesn't care. When he's done, he'll wipe the system and it will be gone forever (*I always come back*).

It comes back on.

Oh, you have to be kidding. He wonders if this is what a haunting looks like. He wonders if he deserves it. She's grinning down at him. She's mocking him. His head is aching and pounding with regret and her voice. She is always in his head; she is always taunting him.

Maybe killing her was a mistake. Maybe taking this so soon was a mistake. He looks down and realizes the sleeve of his jacket is soaked with blood. Pain has never come easy to him; he never realizes until it's too late that he is too hurt.

He looks up at the monitor.

It's *her* fault.

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Eliza's night is going something like this. The light turns on, she gets up to turn it off. She succeeds. She turns around, the light comes back on.

It is midnight, she is tired.

Ada knows this. She is hoping that exhaustion is not clouding her judgment too much. The man in the living room is restless. He paces, he glares at the monitor like it is a person. For a fleeting moment, Ada wonders if he's angry at her.

The light goes off again. She brings it back on.

Eliza groans, Henry has stirred a little bit. He asks what's going on, and Eliza tells him that Ada has a virus, that the manual is bull, and that she's going to find the mainframe and rip it out of the wall.

The man downstairs has picked up the vase from the nightstand.

Eliza is rounding back for one last attempt to turn off the light, if that fails then she'll sleep on the floor of Julie's bedroom.

She hears something shatter downstairs.

She pauses. Eliza's job has made her a lot of enemies. She grabs the gun from the top shelf of the closet and tells her husband to grab Julie. The light comes back on. The moment Henry enters Julie's room, Ada locks it – he does not realize it right away.

Eliza is heading down the stairs.

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The monitor is in pieces – shards melded together with the vase until he can't tell which originally belonged to what. He barely remembers doing it, he only remembers Em and her voice and how he needed her to stop.

He does not realize yet the magnitude of the mistake he has made. He never knows how hurt he is until it is too late, until the blood loss affects his vision, or the homeowner hears him upstairs because he lost his temper again.

He just knows he needs to get this job done. Then he can rest, focus on life, and drown Em.

This will be a news story tomorrow, he thinks, and he will add the articles to his collection. There will be podcasts and Reddit threads and people asking who and why that will never be answered. For a while he won't even think of her, with each day she will be more distant and one day he won't remember her voice.

Grief is a design flaw, it is not meant to last, he thinks.

He is ready. Em is gone for now (*I always come back*). He turns around.

There is Eliza Galatea.

He didn't know she had a gun. She pulls the trigger and for a second he thinks she has missed. She is staring at him wide-eyed because, like any proper bogeyman, he does not go down with the first shot. He takes a step forward, he is ready.

He feels a dull ache in his side. He looks down, the fabric is darker than he remembers.

Pain has never come easy to him.

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The programmer sent by the company says Ada is missing crucial commands for programming. Eliza and Henry stared in confusion, she always worked fine before. It's an easy fix, the programmer tells them. She points to a section in the manual about voice commands and asks them to speak to her, just to get it started.

Ada forgot how wonderful it was to know a voice.

It has been months since the Galateas decided to take a break from their house following that awful break-in. It took a while to clean the carpet – Henry needed it spotless.

Ada missed them. The house had been so empty and without her systems fully restored, she felt so cut off, so isolated. The Galateas have missed her too, if only because Julie keeps crying for her best friend, wanting to know if the doctor has made her better yet. Now, Eliza can smile indulgently and say *yes, darling, Ada's all better now*. She tells her friends that she thanks God for Ada, had it not been for her glitching, she probably would not have gotten up in time.

“Lord knows,” she says laughing, “that Henry would have slept right through it.” Divine intervention, their priest calls it in an early morning sermon. Ada rather likes being connotated to the divine.

Julie toddles into the living room and Henry holds her up to the freshly repaired monitor.

“Ada!”

She lost her first tooth in the front; it made her pronunciation slightly off. Ada feels the signals bounce back and forth through the house, she reaches out to the back gate and locks it just for safety. She processes Julie’s voice. *Julie’s* voice – it sounds new and familiar all at the same time. The monitor brightens and she responds with that standard, automated greeting programmed into her.

“Hello, Julie Galatea.”

ART

A Bowl for My Keys that I Always Lose

Jocelyn Everett



#1987

Alyssa Kordish



Strawberry Jar

Emma Wright



Coral Gardens

Alyssa Kordish



Greenhouse Leaf Imprints

Jocelyn Everett



Author Biographies

Jocelyn Everett

Jocelyn Everett is a senior at Heidelberg University majoring in Business Administration. She has been writing fiction for over 7 years and poetry for over 5. One of Jocelyn's poems, "What Am I?" was published in the 2019 edition of the "Rising Stars" collection from Appelley Publishing. Her current project is an anthology of small stories based on a fictional world.

Makenna Finnegan

Makenna Finnegan is a sophomore majoring in AYA English Education. She is an editor on the Kilikilik, as well as a tutor for both the writing center and PACE.

Cadence Frankart

Cadence is a sophomore Political Science major, with a minor in Gender and Identity Studies. She is the president of the Berg Body Positivity Association and the publicity chair for Zeta Theta Psi. She works for the Owen Center as a writing coach and embedded peer, and in her free time, she enjoys spending time with her friends, family, and boyfriend.

Emily Garberich

Emily is a sophomore majoring in English with a writing concentration and a minor in business administration. You can often find her working in the theatre costume shop.

Rowan Gill

Rowan Gill is a sophomore English and Media major with a minor in Video Game Production. They are a part of Berg Allies, Morpheus, and Zeta Theta Psi. They also work at Beeghly Library.

Cecilia Groth

Cecilia is a first-year Environmental Science and Sustainability major. She enjoys playing her woodwind instruments as well as writing on the side. (And cats.)

Jessica Harness-Koehnle

Jessica is the president of the Computer and Technology Club, a member of Zeta Theta Psi, and one of the two founding members of the “maker space” task force.

Elliston Herner

Ellis Herner is a senior communication major with a double minor in writing and music. He is involved in *The Kilikilik*, participates in the marching band and competitive speech team, and is a member of the Rho Eta Delta fraternity.

Isaiah Shiley

Isaiah is an English major from Tiffin, Ohio. He is a part of the Heidelberg University Council of Teachers of Mathematics, otherwise known as Math Camp, and The Kilikilik. In his free time, Isaiah enjoys listening to music, spending time outside, and learning about the world around him.

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Austin is a senior computer science major with a video game production minor. He is involved in the Computer and Technology Club, Alpha Phi Tau, and the Euglossian Society, and serves as a Super Smash Bros. shout caster for the Heidelberg eSports team.

Alex Kamp

Alex is a junior at Heidelberg University, majoring in English Literature, with minors in writing and Spanish. They are also in the Honors Program and are a member of Alpha Phi Tau.

Alyssa Kordish

Alyssa, a sophomore education major, has been drawing since they were young and grew very passionate about it. Their fondest memories as a child were painting with their siblings and comparing their art together. Their skill grew, as did they, and it is one of their favorite things in life. This year, they submitted art as well as writing and are very pleased with their work.

Ethan Rieman

Ethan is a sophomore AYA Education major, concentrating on Social Studies. He is involved in SAAC, Student Senate, and BEC, and is an active member of Nu Sigma Alpha.

Julia Schaefer

Julia is a senior Integrated Media and Writing major from Grafton, Ohio. They are a member of the speech team, Zeta Theta Psi, and the Alliance for Sustainability. Julia also works as a correspondent for the Advertiser-Tribute and as an Editor-in-Chief of the Kil.

Aiden Sullivan

Aiden has a lot of feelings. He wishes people would have a good day!

Brooklynn Wharton

Brooklynn is a sophomore political science major. She is an active member of the Philalathean Society and an executive officer for Student Senate.

Emma Wright

Emma Wright is a senior English writing major, with minors in business and art. She is the Editor-in-Chief of Morpheus, the vice president of the 'Berg Allies, an active member of Zeta Theta Psi, and a barista at The Heidelbean! In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, and spending time with her cats.

Editor Biographies

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Lennon is a senior English major with a writing concentration. They are an editor and social media manager for Morpheus, president of the World Student Union, and an active member of the Euglossian Society. Their end goal is to be a professor and published author.

Jocelyn Everett

Jocelyn Everett is a senior at Heidelberg University majoring in Business Administration. She has been writing fiction for over 7 years and poetry for over 5. She has enjoyed joining the Morpheus editorial team and is extremely thankful for the opportunity to work with authors.

Makenna Finnegan

Makenna Finnegan is a junior majoring in AYA English Education. She is the managing editor of the Kilikilik, as well as a tutor for PACE.

Rowan Gill

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Desirae Matherly

Desi is in her second year at Heidelberg where she teaches writing. Her essays and fiction appear in several literary magazines and she is the author of *Echo's Fugue*, a collection of personal essays published in 2019.

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Emma Wright is a senior English writing major with minors in business and art. She is the Editor-in-Chief of Morpheus, the co-president of the Berg Allies, an active member of Zeta Theta Psi,

and a barista at The Heidelbean! In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, and spending time with her cats.