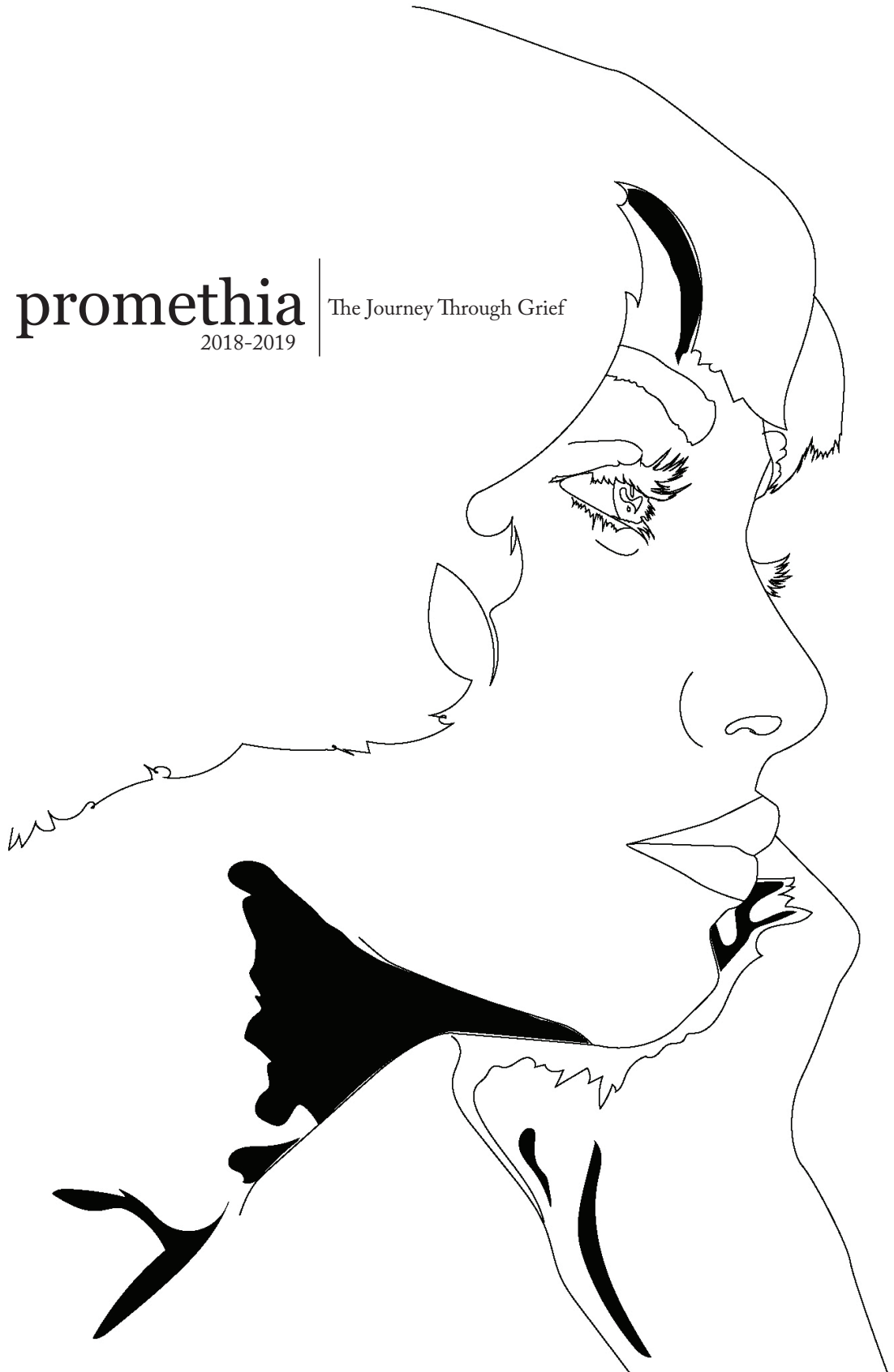


**promethia** | The Journey Through Grief  
2018-2019



# Editor’s Note

While the *Promethia* team was deciding on a theme for this year’s edition, we wanted to choose a topic that is not written about often but needs to be. When my co-editor, Kirsten Dominguez, brought the idea of “grief” to the table, it was a unanimous decision.

Grief is felt by many, but no two people experience it the same. According to psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross who developed the “five stages of grief,” an individual will go through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, those going through the grieving process may or may not experience all five stages and may experience them out of order. With such a serious topic at hand, we wanted to treat it with the utmost care in how we approached it.

As you, the reader, are flipping through the pages of short stories, poetry, and art-work, keep the “five stages of grief” in mind. Like any other art form, the meaning of each piece may vary between readers, but our aim was to find pieces that somehow dealt with one of the stages of grief. Although grief is typically thought of as coinciding with the loss of a family member or friend, grief can also be felt when changing career paths, a transition to a different season in life, etc.

On behalf of the *Promethia* team, thank you for your readership and support. This edition of *Promethia* is intended to start conversations and help you who are journeying through grief.

Know that you are not alone.

Sincerely,

Reagan Fleming, Editor of *Promethia*

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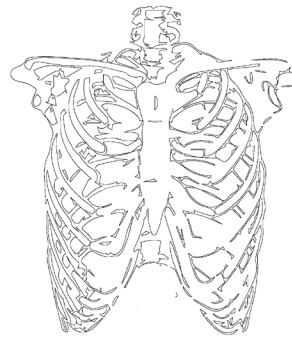
# Toronto

Reagan Fleming

We drove through a blizzard,  
all to see Mom's family.  
White dust floated around us,  
hitting the windshield like tiny,  
soft pellets, but became tightly packed  
when they hit the ground, the tires  
grasping to find any traction  
at 40 mph on the freeway—  
the nine hours crept to twelve,  
and our van crept right along with them.  
We stopped for coffee, like every  
road trip, but Dad couldn't finish his,  
claiming it was too bitter for some reason.

Snowmobiles waited for us at  
Uncle Larry's, but I couldn't drive one  
at twelve; the massive contraptions  
required strength and weight, both things  
I didn't have at the time. My sister drove  
while I sat behind, both of us in  
coats and gloves and balaclavas,  
teasing the cold by only showing our eyes.  
She drove while I tilted left and right and  
left, depending on which way we veered.  
I went right when she drove the opposite,  
and I shot into the air, only for a second,  
then a belly flop on the ice told me  
that no number of coats could provide  
enough padding. I don't know why I  
don't remember the bruising. Later,  
I'd find it pained me to breathe, one of my ribs  
jutting out, ever so slightly.

That night, Dad brought me to pick up Thai food,  
and we waited in a booth under a florescent light.  
He asked my opinion about his complexion,  
and I agreed that the dull glow gave it a  
yellowish tinge. My uncle said jaundiced skin  
could be a symptom of something—  
something to do with the liver, and it was  
more than just the lights, even though I  
wish it wasn't. Four months later and  
my rib still juts out as evidence of that trip,  
and we found that the florescent lights  
didn't lie that night.



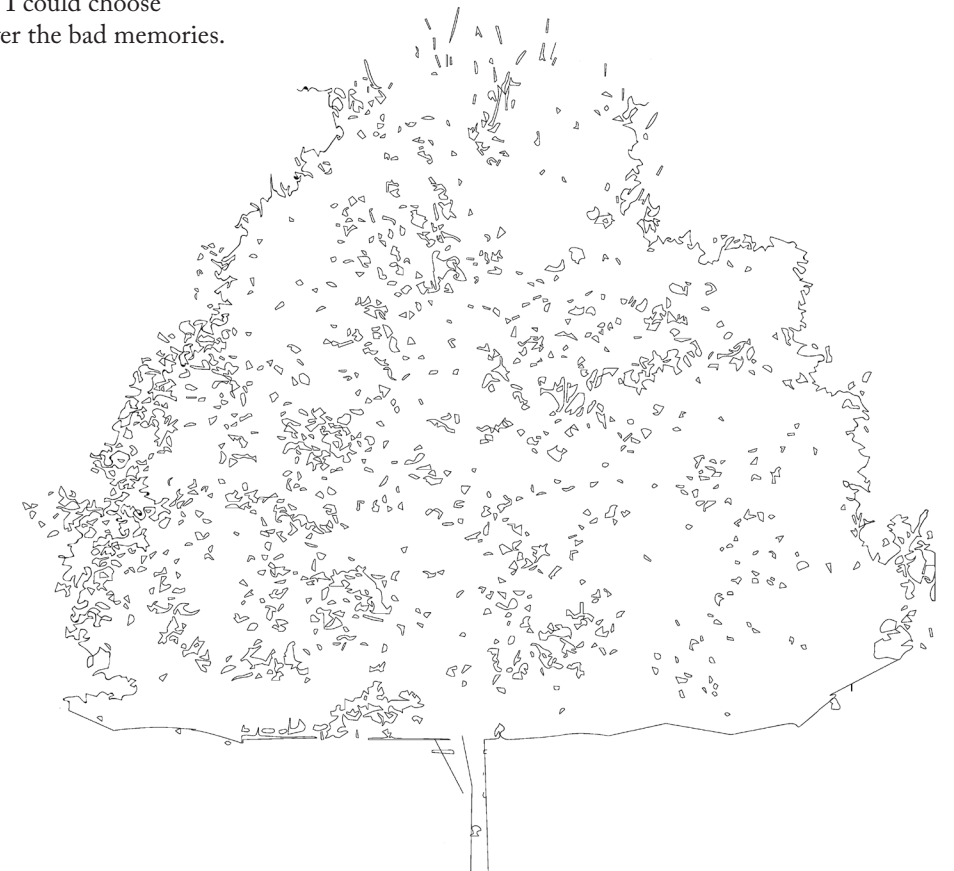
Artwork by Karl Valcourt

# January 3 – April 11

Reagan Fleming

Those four months, we catered to an unwelcome visitor  
who took up residence, disrupting our home  
and Dad's immune system.  
Hearty meals exchanged for juices that  
shrunk him down to size, like a lanky teenage boy,  
bones sharp and jutting underneath loose layers,  
his mouth now mute and  
eyes wide with a childlike wonder  
The carrots corrected his sight—  
the ideal 20/20—  
but they didn't recognize me.

Those twelve years before, we had  
breakfast and Nickelodeon on Saturday mornings,  
basketball drills in the driveway, and you'd  
come home right at 6 pm, face beaming  
when you looked at Mom.  
You and I would play I Spy games while  
perched in the big maple tree out front,  
hidden behind green leaves turning to match the bark.  
I'd cheat and choose a car that already passed,  
but you'd let it slide and still guess incorrectly.  
Now I wish I could choose  
the good over the bad memories.



Artwork by Karl Valcourt

Artwork by Luke Wagner

# The Red Couch

Reagan Fleming

It’s happening again.

I push my eyes open and force myself to sit up, although I do so a little too quickly. I sit up straighter for a moment and close my eyes, even though the room is completely dark anyway. I hear scraping against the wall of the hallway, which just so happens to be on the opposite side of my bedroom door. Two, maybe three men’s voices are now audible, although I can’t understand them with their medical jargon—they are emergency medical technicians, back again for the second time this month.

I open my eyes and gingerly swing my legs over the side of my bed. I propel myself into a standing position and walk over to the light switch next to my door—my now stinging eyes squint almost to a close in response to the sudden light. I reach into my drawer and pull out a pair of comfy jeans, then I open another drawer and grab a loose-fitting t-shirt. I think to myself, My shoes are by the door. I’ll get them after the EMTs leave.

I wait, fully dressed, sitting on my bed. I know that my mom will come in at some point to alert me on what has happened. It’s no use, because I already know.

He’s on his way to the hospital again, that part I know; it could be because he stopped breathing, like last week. Or, it could be something totally different, I mean, I’m not a doctor. I don’t know all the possible side effects of cancer.

I hear a soft tap on my door, unlike the harsh scraping from a few minutes ago. Scraping, which I know from experience, is the sound of a stretcher carrying my father away to the emergency room.

The door opens without my giving the okay, and it’s not my mom, but my neighbor. She looks surprised that the light is already on and I am already dressed. She informs me that my dad was having trouble breathing, so my mom went with the EMTs to take him to the emergency room to make sure everything was “all right.” She asks if I want her to stay the night and sleep on the living room couch. That couch is red. Red and very comfortable, shaping to your body once you lie on it for an hour or two. Before my dad got sick, I would leave my bedroom door open at night. Four nights out of seven, I could hear him out there snoring on that couch, completely oblivious to what was playing on the TV screen at that point. He would later go back to their bedroom after waking up from a loud blast from the TV, signaling that it was time for a commercial break. But as I drifted off to sleep in my bed, hearing him snore just a few rooms away was when I felt the safest. Although lately, he’s been limited to one room in the house, a makeshift “hospital room away from the hospital.”

I don’t know why I told my neighbor that she didn’t have to stay—I’m 12 years old. I don’t have a fear of the dark per se, but I sure as heck don’t like it. As we all could have guessed, I couldn’t go back to sleep after she left.

Too late now, I tell myself. Before my neighbor left, she told me that my mom would be back in a few hours to check in on me. A few hours could mean anything to an adult. Me? I think: two hours. That’s a few. Just to be safe, I’ll say that she’ll be back in three. That’s enough time to give her to sit with my dad in the cold and dingy and unnecessarily loud hospital waiting room. That’s enough time to wait on the doctor, to have the doctor check him out, and then to come back with the right medicines to make him feel better.

I have my pajamas on again, and I can’t decide which movie to fall asleep to. I turn on the lamp by the couch, decide on my second movie option, and put it in the DVD player. The living room is well lit. I am by myself. The red couch is comfy, like always. A little less than three hours to go.

“A little less than three hours to go.”



# The Death of Esperanza the First

Megan Darling

Day Zero

My face wet with my own personal rain  
Memories flying in like insects in a garden  
Some beautiful  
Some stinging my heart  
How could you be gone?

Day Three

The rain continues  
But the heat comes like a fire that I fling at everyone in my path  
You could always calm my storms  
But you can't pick up the phone anymore

Day Ten

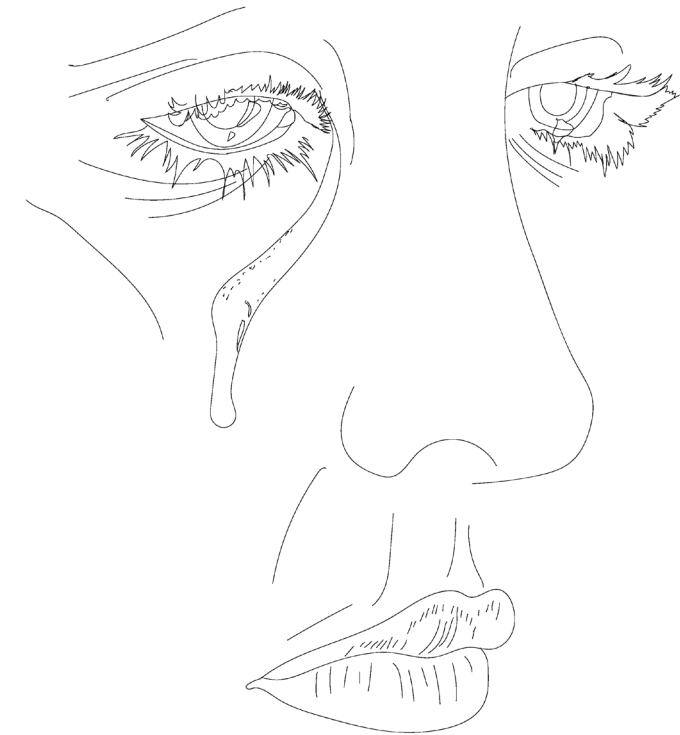
The storm has turned into an inward war  
God took the only general to make me see sense  
I bargain to see you again  
Or even just hear you sing  
Or pray away this pain in my heart

Day Thirty-Two

The war is paused as the pages of my story are forced to move forward  
But every pause in my day reminds me of you  
Every question in my mind makes me want to pick up the phone  
To call a number that has been disconnected

Day One Hundred and Thirty-Two

Thoughts of you still plague my mind  
As my kids grow older and make stupider decisions  
I want to call you  
To hear your wisdom  
But you are giving God your wisdom now  
But I have hope I will see you again  
Mi Esperanza



“My face wet with my own personal rain”

# Car Line

Shaynee Sherwood

Slightly obnoxious woman  
With a tacky  
Faded tattoo on her ankle  
Trying to tell me what to do

Yes, ma'am  
You have wrinkles  
On your hands and forehead  
That were etched into your flesh  
Before I was conceived  
But I've lived in midtown Manhattan  
I can handle  
Carefully weaving  
My way through a small school traffic jam  
I thought to myself  
Almost every Monday through Friday  
As she loudly spoke into her megaphone  
Last names of children  
Waiting to be picked up

She acts like a cheerleader dating the quarterback  
I'll pass on her personality  
I thought  
Nothing against her  
Just not my cup of tea

But then I met her son  
Solid white blonde hair  
A slightly awkward and mostly sweet only child  
Who studies the two brothers I nanny  
Like he is studying for a life exam  
"How to have a sibling 101"

We are on a play date  
And the Florida sun is melting popsicles  
And ruining our other summer outdoor plans  
And here I am  
Sitting poolside  
With her  
As she picks paint from underneath her  
Nails

I'm painting a room she says  
But doesn't say much else about it  
But we laugh and talk  
And I begin  
To like this woman

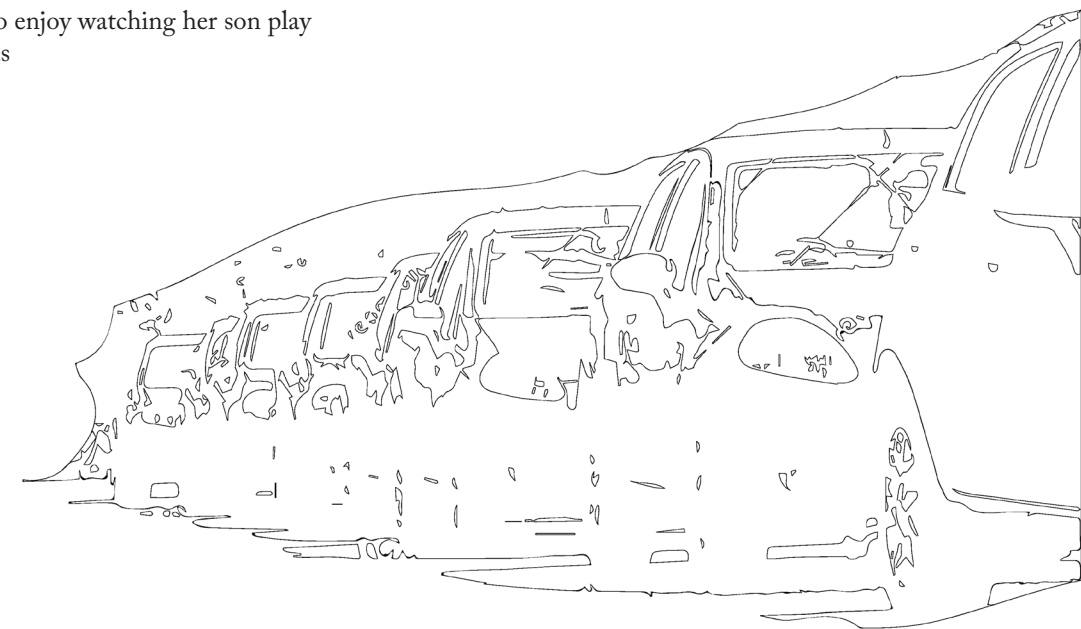
This kindergarten teacher  
With one child  
Who is constantly offering me  
A moment to take a break  
As she seems to enjoy watching her son play  
With other kids  
By herself

And later that day  
She brings up painting that room again  
To another mom  
And she's telling her  
How the room needs to be a happy escape  
A healing and relaxing place  
So, she's painting it a cheerful yellow

And she quickly pauses to explain  
To me  
That the room was supposed to be a nursery  
That's why they moved into the place  
As her belly grew for 5 months

And now two years later  
There she stands  
Paint under her nails  
And on her shirt  
Carefully moving on past loss  
Gaining a new friend

Because I will now listen to her differently  
In the car line  
As I hear her call the last names of children  
Waiting to be picked up  
With one child  
Who is constantly offering me  
A moment to take a break  
As she seems to enjoy watching her son play  
With other kids





# ¿Y Hora, Que Hare? [And now what will I do?]

Kirsten Dominguez

Un chorrito de Cloro, [A bit of Clorox,]  
and whatever else you  
put in that red bucket  
to make things clean.

You swished  
and swashed them,  
and then you let them sit,  
while you sat, ate our cake,  
and watched telenovelas.

Somehow, beyond what I understood,  
magic would happen in that red bucket.  
Folded, white, and pristine,  
my garments would reappear in my drawers.  
Without a doubt,  
all things could be cleaned  
and restored by you.

Pero y ahora? [And now?]

I stained a couple white shirts and a white dress,  
and I have a hole in my black sweater,  
but who cares, right? You can fix them.  
But I'm told you stopped walking over the bridge  
into the dry heat of El Paso,  
and meeting my mom at the bus stop.  
You stopped eating our food in-between washes,  
stopped watching our television  
while you swept, mopped, and babysat  
my brother, who loves you and still believes you'll return.

Maybe you left because you were depressed,  
because children aren't supposed to die before their parents,  
but your daughter did.  
I know it was painful to see me when I came home from college.  
So, you decided to leave us to be with her.

Pero y ahora, [And now,]  
que hare sin ti? [what will I do without you?]

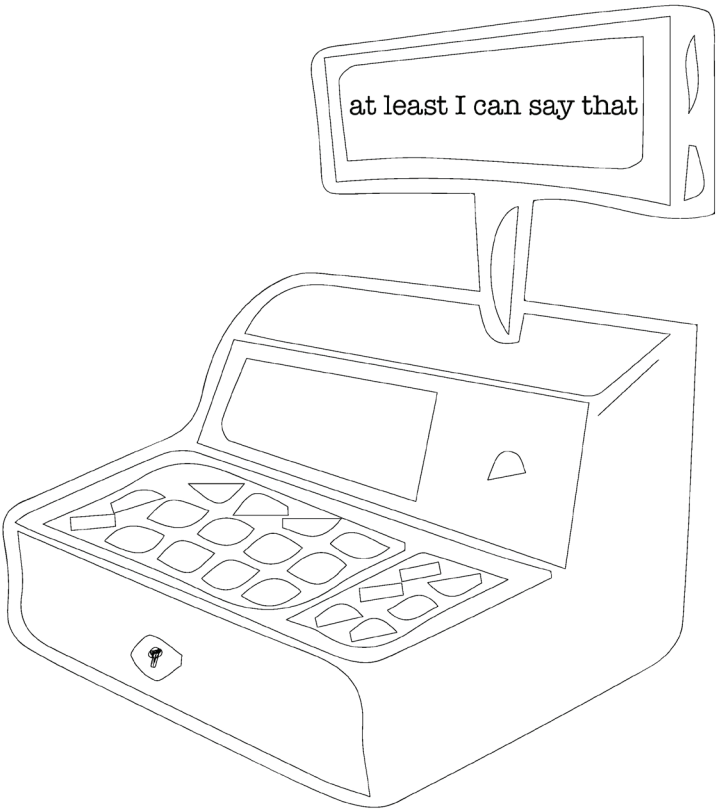
Because you never taught me how to do these things  
and I never asked you how...  
You didn't tell me where the magic comes from,  
and I don't know how to make things white again.  
I don't know how to make them whole.

Mujer preciosa, [Precious woman,]  
que hare sin ti? [what will I do without you?]



“I don't know how to make them whole.”





# As It Is in Heaven

Joshua Lacy

We walk the streets of gold, lined with golden leaf,  
to the market for your mother for berries and cream.  
Your hair, I can't see what color it is, but it may as well be gold too.  
Little hand, big hand, you're the boy that has no name. But I've named you.  
I shout your name, when I see you playing ball, and by God, you're not the best,  
but dad taught you a thing or two. At least I never had to lie to you.  
At least I can say that.

The streets aren't gold yet.  
Golden diamond ball park is overgrown, and shag green carpet,  
and I can't make out what color your hair is while I scan the aisles  
of the market for your mother. Long line, short line, I go to the register  
that has no name, and by God, Brad Pitt is with someone else today.  
I have lied so greatly; this world has taught Dad a thing or two.  
At least I can say that.



# Quality Time

Kyle Ross

I arrive from nothingness by a gentle nudge from firm hands.  
“It’s five-fifty.”

My eyes are puffy and glassed over, and my mouth is cotton dry. I know he won’t wait too long, and I won’t make him. He’d just as soon leave me than be late. But first I had to at least orient my hungover self. I separated up from down rather quickly, but my left and right took a fair bit longer. All symptoms of him—too little sleep, too many Buds, and too much time to think. Usually, there is too little time to sit, and drink with dad, and talk, and reminisce; that is, until something like this happens, and then there is far too much time for that sort of thing. All of a sudden too much time to be lost in your thoughts. So last night, Dad and I just got drunk.  
“It’s almost six.”

He was better at this type of thing than me. He had probably been up since four, drank a full pot of coffee, and chewed half a can of the red-labeled Copenhagen already. Then again, I stayed up a good two hours longer than he did, so I guess it was the thirty-five years of experience between us that accounted for the difference in our schedules. I rolled out of that old dirty couch and caught myself with the floor. I stood up, oh so graciously, and put my hat on my matted down hair to become decently presentable. I walked out of the house and into the garage, closing the door quietly to not wake Mom. He was sitting on an old, rusted folding chair holding two Styrofoam cups filled with dark Folgers, with which he handed me one that I used to scald my awful morning breath. He sat with boots laced under strong legs, wearing frayed, cut-off jean shorts beneath a once white, extra-large, cotton t-shirt over a once white, extra-large frame that was now a dark, thick leather one that I never saw bleed. I followed him to the old green truck that I used to love to fall asleep in almost every weekend as we drove. I could stay awake now, though.

Our rides together consisted of rolled down windows. No radio or pointless conversation because there was no use for extra noise. Dad isn’t fond of noise. I guess there just isn’t enough room for it with him; he is fulfilled and confident without it. Not like other people who let noise come and go without ever noticing. I guess dad was just more aware than that. People oblivious to dynamics—people to whom noise occupies the gaps in their self—I’m not friends with those kinds of people because Dad isn’t friends with those kinds of people. The rolled down windows were enough. Just being together was enough. And so, we drove the back roads of quaint, Southern Illinois to the Grand River access bridge, pulling the boat like always, and backed down the boat ramp.

“Make sure the plug is in.”

I got in the boat, unlatched it from the trailer, put the plug in, and gave dad the thumbs-up for him to back the boat in the water. He parked the truck as I waited for him in that old aluminum rust-bucket that should have already sunk a hundred times before. It was only big enough for three people, one dog, and maybe ten decently sized catfish, but today it would have to hold the weighty emptiness he left us to bear.

Dad parked the truck and walked down to the boat, packing another dip in his bottom lip as he came. The boat wasn’t very wide, and it teetered up and down and back and forth when all of him got in it. I wait for him to get off balance and take a dip over the edge every time we fish the river, but it probably won’t ever happen. He does this pretty athletic thing where his beer gut shifts intuitively and offsets the swaying of his not-yet-brittle hips. I fell in once, and he still hasn’t let me live it down. He called me Stink Bait for the whole month of July that summer, and

I have been waiting for my chance to get back at him ever since. But my window for that to be funny probably wouldn’t last much longer. Sooner, or hopefully later, dad would be old enough that if he fell in, it’d be mean to laugh at. He turned sixty-one this past year, three days after I turned twenty-six. He was always a good sport, but at some point, to see him fall over the edge wouldn’t be funny, but instead, it would be scary and hurt. I’ve watched people get old, and it hurts something awful, to be honest.

My grandfather, with all his experience, seemed to cry more often as he aged. I sat in his kitchen once on a Saturday morning and ate pancakes with him that my granny had cooked for us. The ten o’clock news was playing on the television, and he read the morning paper as I was busy stuffing my face with syrup-soaked hotcakes. The paper in his hands drooped, and his big-framed, thick glasses fell up from the dark print.

He looked at my granny, “It says here that Jack Arnold died on Thursday.”

“Oh god, I’m sorry, Bernard. Well, I had heard he had been sick. When is the funeral?”

“Says here that the visitation is Tuesday up at the home, and the funeral is Wednesday morning at the Methodist church.”

“Well, we’ll be there.”

My granny left the room to tend to laundry, and I will never forget watching the tough, stoic, time-beaten face of my grandfather melt.

Tears came from his eyes, and he looked out the window and said to no one in particular, “This getting old sucks....”

My grandfather had known Jack Arnold for probably thirty years. They weren’t close, but they were the type of friends you see in church or visit with in the line at Hy-Vee while you wait to buy your milk. Truth is, Jack had gotten really bad the last year or two of his life. His body decayed at a rate just faster than his once sharp mind. I don’t think my Grandad was as sad that he died as he was about how long it took him to get there. Dad always said, “Dying is easy, getn’ there is the hard part.”

I guess I’ve always thought that would never happen to my dad. But if he fell out of the boat today, I would still laugh, and that’s all that mattered for now. We had dealt with enough for one weekend and could’ve both used a laugh. The two of us had watched Roy get old for too long. But he got to say goodbye to his old, ragged body on Friday, and dad got to sit down in front of me on a five-gallon bucket in the bottom of the boat, dry because he didn’t fall in.

We took off upstream, skipping that shallow aluminum boat across the top of the water with its beat-up 25hp Johnson motor spitting dark smoke the whole way like it always would. It was a sunny Sunday in May, and Dad and I elected to attend church down in the river. The birds would lead the choir, which left me to preach. My father had never really been a religious man, but he’s honest as the day is long, and a better man than most of the religious people I know. I figure God will sort all that out Himself when comes the time, but if my dad fell in the water today, I would still laugh, so I didn’t worry. And honest to God, I figure my Dad and Jesus are much closer than I sometimes worry they are. My mother, on the other hand, wasn’t missing church come Hell or high water, so we asked her to pray hard for us before she left for bed last night.

“Lord knows you two need it,” she said with a grin as she turned the corner to the bedroom.

The early morning sun warmed through my long-sleeve t-shirt, and I rolled up my sleeves to feel the late spring air. As we drove, the spray off the front of the boat aided the coffee in helping sober me up. This morning was gorgeous, and I was glad we weren't stuck in church with Mom. I was sure God was more out here than He was in any stuffy church building this morning. Roy never went to church, but he enjoyed every day with childlike joy and loved people with his whole heart, no matter who they were. I enjoyed spending time with Roy more than I did with half the churchgoing folks I knew, and today was about enjoying him with my father and catching some catfish for him.

We finally pulled up to Roy and my dad's favorite bend and tossed out our little boat's anchor. Roy didn't come into our lives until I was about thirteen or so, and he started fishing with dad and me a couple of years after that. Almost every weekend in the spring and fall of my later high school years was spent between me, Dad, and Roy fishing this river. Roy was quiet, but goofy and so joyful to be around. He was often content just to fall asleep in the boat and enjoy our company. He wasn't one for extra noise, which meant we all got along really well. Saturdays in the fall were my favorite because the weather was always perfect, and Dad and I would go on and on, analyzing my football games from the night before, as Roy would inevitably fall asleep. Then when I was away in college, my dad would call on days the fishing was good and give me a report. Usually, it was only a good enough day to call if he and Roy had both caught their full limit of catfish. I moved back home recently to start a new job, but since I'd been back, Roy had just gotten too old to go with Dad and me. I remember what my grandfather had said while I was leaning over the side of the boat, puking up some coffee that tasted like beer.

"You gonna be all right there, princess?"

"I'm getn' along better than you ever have, old man."

"Oh, I doubt it."

We both kinda laughed, threw in our lines with stink bait smeared on treble hooks, and let them sink near the bottom of the river.

We sat there for about a half-hour or so, pretty quietlike until dad sank his hook in what looked like a good fish.

"Least one of us showed up to play today," he murmured to get at me.

"He ain't in the boat yet, you old fart."

Eventually, the wide-faced channel cat surfaced near the boat, and I netted what was a decent fish.

"Man, that doesn't ever get old."

We shared grins, and dad kneeled in the bottom, reaching over the side to unhook his fish. It took him longer than normal, and when he stood up, his knee looked bruised, and there was blood on his hand.

"Fish bleeding?"

"No, hell, I must have cut my hand on the hook."

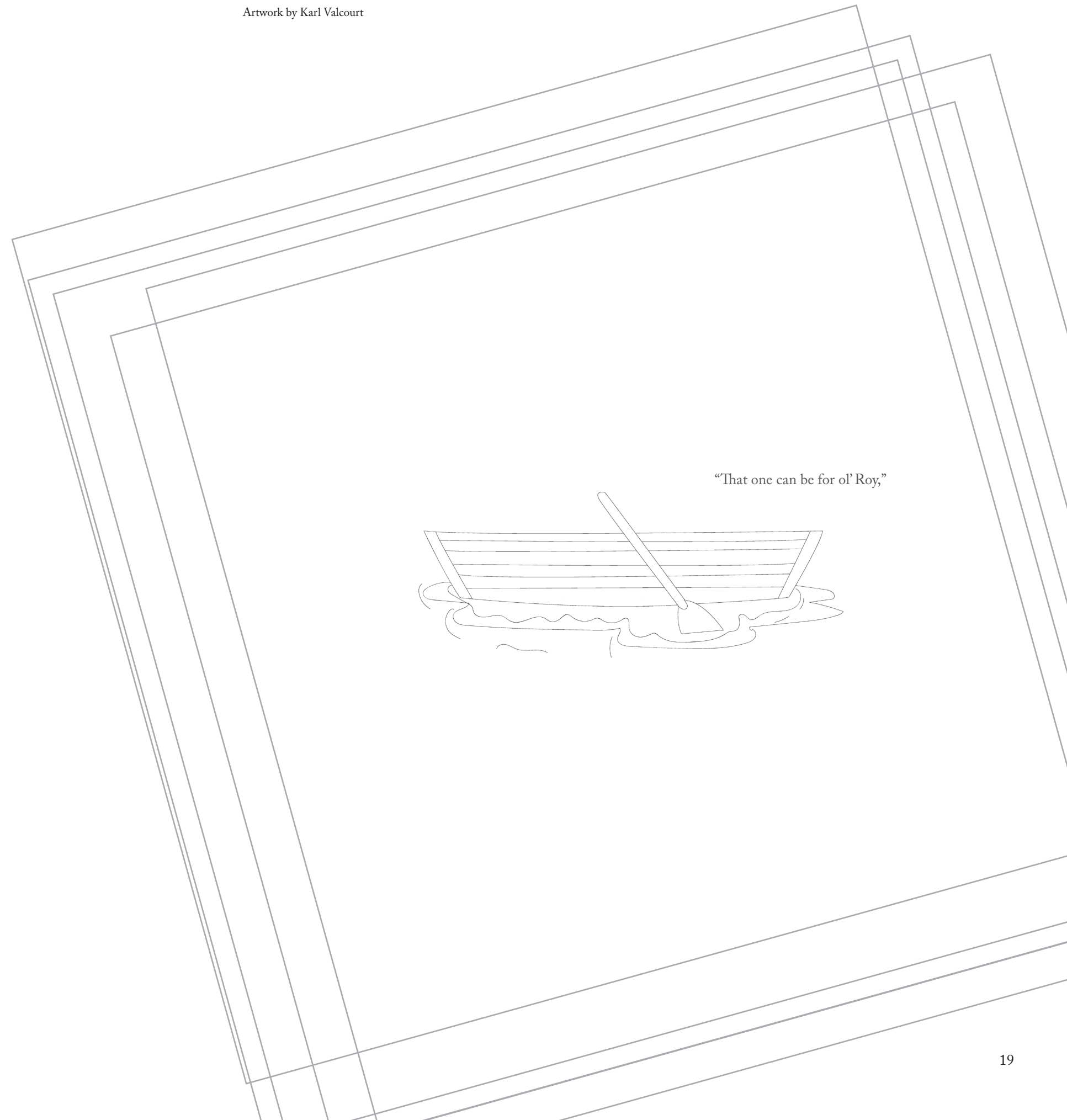
"Is your knee okay?"

"Oh, it's fine. For some reason, I've been bruising easily lately. Here, take a picture for Mom."

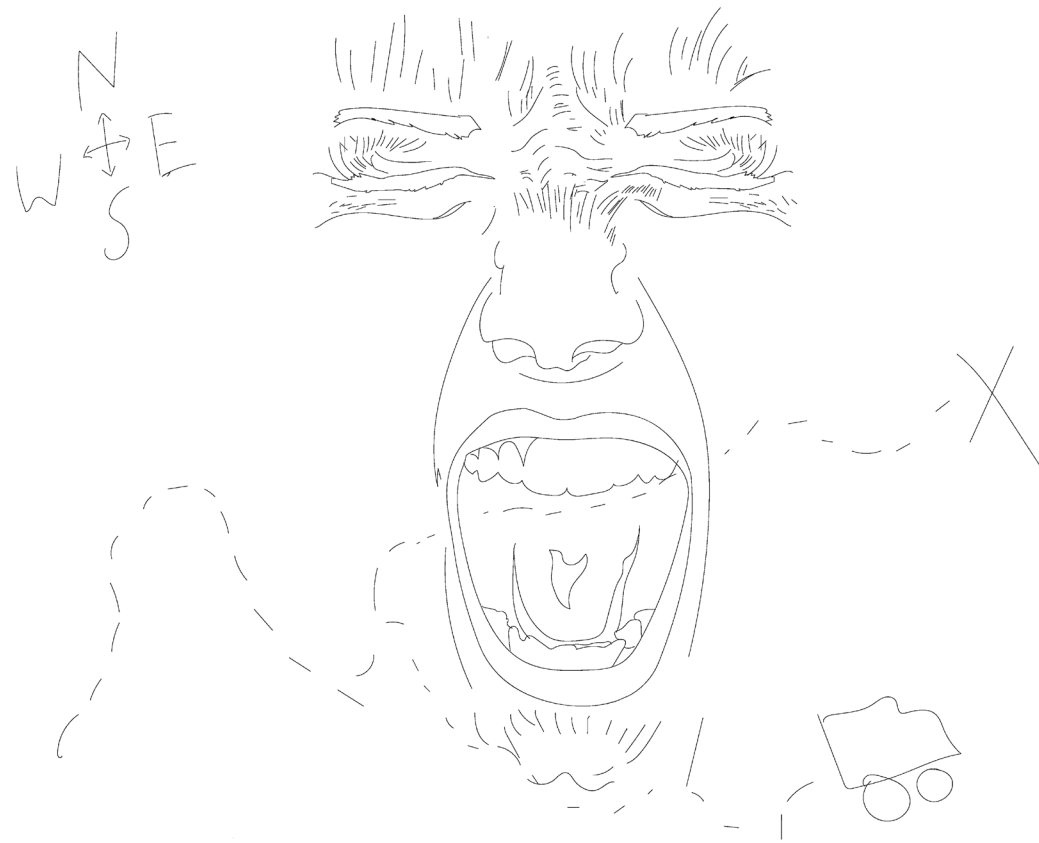
He gave me his old, junk camera, held the fish up near his face, and showed his rarely seen teeth. And then for the first time in my life, instead of putting the fish on the stringer for dinner, I watched my old man let that fish go.

"That one can be for ol' Roy," he said with a genuine smile from his eyes, trying not to choke up. Then my dad reached into his dad's tackle box and pulled out a smaller wooden box. "Not many dogs like him."

And that's all that was said. Dad opened up that small wooden box and poured out some black ashes that were once Roy in that bend of Grand River. Then we both baited our hooks, cast them out, sat in the loud quiet, and the three of us enjoyed each other's company.



"That one can be for ol' Roy,"



## The Great Perhaps

Paige McQueen

Here it is  
 The whole of my heart.  
 Do you see the veins that twist  
 That turn  
 The pain  
 That makes it burn.

Here it is  
 My entire life.  
 Spread out before me like  
 An old weathered map  
 Worn  
 From everyone else's  
 Road-trips.

Here it is  
 The truth.  
 I am not her and will never be  
 The girl you wish I was.  
 I'm done  
 Trying to be the blurry image  
 Reflected in your Raybans.

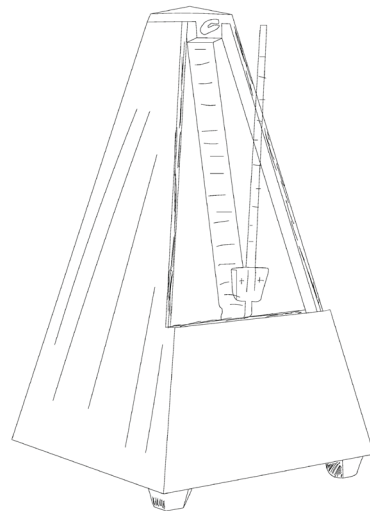
Here it is  
 The part  
 where I stutter goodbye  
 And you never discover  
 The immense potential  
 Housed in my soul.

Here it is  
 That tattered old map.  
 I've ripped it to shreds  
 Charred it in my fiery heart.  
 I will never choose the highway  
 When the wild is one exit away.

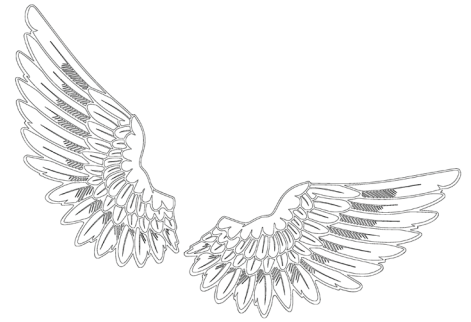
# For a Mother

Keith Gogan

The day the doctors told my dad and me that she would never know us again  
They stuttered and stammered jargon while Dad choked up and  
I strained to understand and  
We knew she was not Mom, not Honey, anymore  
Unable to even breathe on her own, her chest rising and  
Falling  
A metronome in a tuneless room  
In which we decided that machines  
Should not play God  
One day later, I'm waiting for the phone call that means her  
Permanently closed door  
Or, really, her open one  
And I whim a Google search of Mom's name  
Finding nothing,  
No cheap shiny plastic badge pinned on her name in cyberspace  
However, she had been a Registered Nurse, an RN  
But I liked to call her Registered Nut  
Because it made her laugh and because  
She understood me, her utterly odd one who  
Never married or produced grandkids:  
She didn't care.  
She did care for her three kids  
Who are generally  
Happy and  
Unfamiliar with jail cells  
Gifted with a mother who made  
Mrs. Walton look like a fraud  
Whose resume walks this planet  
As two daughters and a son  
Inclined to ask  
Mr. Google, with all due respect,  
What the hell do you know about anything



Artwork by Karl Valcourt



# Esperanza

Megan Darling

She flew in like the tornadoes where she's from  
No way of knowing the damage until the storm's over  
The damage ripped through my world  
In disguise of boxes, Bibles, and foreign tongues  
A crown around her ring finger had me  
Fearing I'd become Cinderella  
With no singing animals or fairy godmother to help me  
But dad had never looked so happy  
So, I smiled and stayed quiet  
I tried to seek shelter like I'd always done  
But she tore down my walls  
And buried herself so deep in my life  
It was like she had always been there  
Later I realized she wasn't a tornado  
She was the rescue crew  
She was my fairy godmother  
Showing me how to use my wings  
To fly away from the place  
I never realized I was trapped

Artwork by Karl Valcourt



# The White Board

Mason Beasler

Sharp wind cuts across a group of Northern Red Oak at the edge of the clearing, bending their long arms to the left in unison. I watch and find it odd, as even the mightiest timber must give way to something as small and fickle as the wind. The same gust soon greets me—commonplace for Boston in the fall. A field of stones stretches out before me, but I’ve never been here before. I only learned about Sam last week, but I wasn’t able to make it back in time. The grass here is a deep, thick green, my favorite color. The forest bends all around me, looking as if an army of giants has laid siege to me entirely, and my heart feels about the same. Occasionally, a leaf makes its final descent to the ground, reminding me of the coming season, and also why I have come.

My mind slips back to earlier times, simpler times—or at least they had been until Sam was there. I remember that year as daunting for anyone, but I knew it would be really tough for Sam since he moved to town in the middle of a semester. *Poor kid*, I remember thinking. But what do I know? Not much, and even less back then. I’d first met Sam by the lockers at Fenway—the high school, not the ballpark. An annoying distinction we always had to make and hated for as long as I could remember. Samuel Harrison couldn’t have been over five-five or 130 pounds. His hair was short, almost blonde, and unkempt. I was pretty sure it was light brown, but that day he was wearing a cap. His pale skin made him look afraid. I remember thinking about how his horrible luck seemed to have held when he got a locker by the football team. They weren’t especially kind and of course caused him trouble. I probably would have heard just as much as I saw, but I haven’t heard anything in years.

He was picking his bag off the ground and scooping his things back inside after another round with a few of our defensive lineman—stellar human beings. I handed him a few yellow pencils that had scooted my way.

“Thanks,” he said. I couldn’t lip read the tone in his voice, but I would’ve bet he sounded dejected. He looked tired.

I scratched out, “*You’re welcome*,” on my little dry erase board and showed him as he stood back up. Most people looked at me in shock the first time they realized my lack of perception in the auditory department. They would say something like, “Are you deaf?” And every time, I would laugh a little to myself at the irony of their question.

But not Sam. He looked at the white board, and then looked at me, and smiled. It wasn’t a bright smile. It wasn’t a joyful or ecstatic smile. It was a thankful smile, and I could see it clearly. He understood I couldn’t hear him but seemed to know I was listening all the same.

I watch a squirrel scamper across a limb at the rim of the forest, quickly leaping to another tree, a strong oak that stands out and seems to dominate the grove. I’m alone, and the stillness of nature gives even more power to requiem. I stand, for there is nowhere to sit here, and besides, it wouldn’t feel right. I gaze at the burly oak, my thoughts again returning to Boston and the past.

Sam was 14 that year, and I was 17. The oak right there is much like the tree I loved at Fenway. I was sitting alone under its branches for lunch hour, the ritual of a deaf kid, when Sam walked up. He only had a sandwich in a plastic bag, also a ritual. At first, I thought it was a shadow from the leaves above. But when he sat down, the shadow over his left eye remained, and it looked darker than any shadow I’d ever seen before.

“*What happened*,” I scribbled.

“*Foul ball*,” he wrote underneath. I can still remember what it was like to believe him. I’d just met him the week before. He’d given me no reason to withhold trust. I don’t remember how much time went by before I noticed the wincing. Sam would reach for his locker, which was at about eye level for him, and sometimes he’d grab his side in pain. No one was watching; no one ever noticed Sam. Except me. After watching him do it a couple of times, I got curious. He said he’d fallen off his bike, but I’d never heard of anyone hurting their side that way. Usually an arm or a wrist. One day, I saw Sam in the locker room changing after PE. He’d moved to the far back, away from most of the traffic. I saw why. Much of his right side was black and blue. He tenderly pulled his shirt over his head and down his torso, careful not to touch the dark bruises.

I stand by the large oak at the edge of the clearing, trying to remember more about Sam. He was going through hell back then, and I remember having every intention of pulling him out. He didn’t like me knowing—didn’t like anyone knowing. His life was like an onion in more ways than the tears; I had to pull it back a layer at a time, each one revealing a new part of him, and a new hurt to go with it. My discovery came about a month later. His father was supposed to pick him up from school, but he was late again. So, I sat on the curb with Sam and watched the sun get lower as colorful vans and trucks passed on the roadway. Sometimes, we didn’t talk. We just sat there. It was cumbersome to use the board, and most people, Sam included, didn’t know sign language. But the stillness of this forest reminds me of the greater reason we didn’t talk. We didn’t need to. The presence of each other helped both of us get by. The trunks of these trees never make a sound, but their presence is stirring.

The white truck squealed against the pavement as Sam’s father roared to a stop. His checkered shirt was unbuttoned and tattered on the sides. His white undershirt had a small oil stain that was nearly hidden under the lip created by the beer belly underneath. But I notice these things. I’d never seen his father before and wondered to myself if he was always this angry.

“Get in,” he ordered, and Sam obeyed. His father slammed the passenger door behind him as if Sam had just been picked up from a bar after curfew.

I knew instantly. I didn’t have to witness it or be granted proof. It was in his father’s eyes. I had learned by that time to get to know people with my eyes, because that was all I had. The father’s eyes carried only rage. The next day, we were sitting under the tree he liked. I remember being afraid he would reject me, his only friend, if I asked. But I knew it was right.

“*He hits you*,” I wrote on the white board, the words completely foreign to me. At the sight of it, Sam grabbed the board and wiped away the words, looking around to ensure privacy. He then looked at me, and shook his head, as if he was trying to convince himself, not me. I nodded in response. He just stared at me. He didn’t cry or even frown.

I didn’t see him for a few days after that. On Wednesday, I opened my locker to get my books, and my white board, and for the first time in my life, there was already writing on it. There were three letters, all lowercase, sitting in the bottom right corner of the board. Yes. I didn’t know what to say to him. I’d been right, but I soon found that was the easy part. In the days and weeks after, he took the position

of silence. Not only for him, but also for me. He didn't want me saying anything to anyone. He didn't want the attention or pity. And especially, he didn't want the shame.

It was a Saturday, and Sam was talking to me again, so he decided to show me his favorite place. We rode our bikes along the shoulder of Derby Road and watched the leaves fall, much like they're doing now. We stopped when we could hear the water flowing through Pine Creek, just inside the forest. All these years later, I can still hear it ringing in my ears—that crisp yet gentle flow. It was serenity. I remember doubting that the small wooden bridge could hold both our bikes at once, but it did. The serenity of the creek was soon replaced by the thunder of metal on metal. The forest gave way to the tracks, and I'd never seen Sam's face light up as much as it did when that locomotive rounded the bend. I had seen a train before, but this looked like Sam's first time, even though I knew it wasn't.

I soon realized something. This was his sanctuary—maybe his only one. He had peace here, and I felt the most honor I'd ever felt in my life that Sam had brought me. He dropped his bike and stared at the train as if it was the only thing in the world. We sat on a log and watched the cars go by for what seemed like days. I watched Sam watch the train, and he seemed lost in it. When the last car had passed, he looked at me and didn't say anything. But his eyes said it all. I remember it was a funny feeling. I didn't know it then, or in the days or months after, but I now know it. Sam was showing me his heart.

889 South Forest St—that was the address of the Police Department in Medford, our town north of Boston. I remember those letters and numbers as the most difficult I'd ever written. They're seared in my memory like a farmer's brand on cattle. They were also printed neatly in the center of a white envelope that sat on my desk. It sat peacefully, but its contents had all the power in the world to turn our worlds upside down. As a deaf kid, I was pretty good at keeping secrets. But his secret hurt; it hurt me, and it hurt Sam. It felt like a hot skillet that I'd been holding too long. I detailed the abuse on several different pages, mentioning the multiple wounds and cuts Sam had sustained, along with his admission on the white board.

The day before, Sam had come to school with stitches above his left eye, a large welt on the back of his head, and a hurt wrist. He went with the bike story again. The next day, I decided to write the letter, and after much deliberation, I convinced myself that I had to tell Sam before I mailed it.

It was a bright day, and I remember because not even the leaves above the tracks could keep the sun out of our faces. We sat on that same old log, and while we were waiting, I was mustering courage. I couldn't think of a better place to tell him. I took out my white board and wrote on it my intentions, leaving it on the log. He read it, and his eyes got big, and he began to put it back down. Then he stood and hurled it into the forest as hard as he could. He glared at me, shaking his head and trying to hold back tears. Then he was gone. I rode home alone and mailed the letter; the best and worst thing I've ever done.

The next day, Sam wasn't at school. Worry consumed me from first period to last. I remember not being able to concentrate because I was worried about where he might be. The days passed, then weeks, without word. I eventually heard that he'd been transferred to a different school. An investigation into his home life was being conducted, and I hoped his father's actions would come to the surface. I ended up graduating a year after that, and the last thing I heard was that Sam had been removed from his home. I never saw him again.

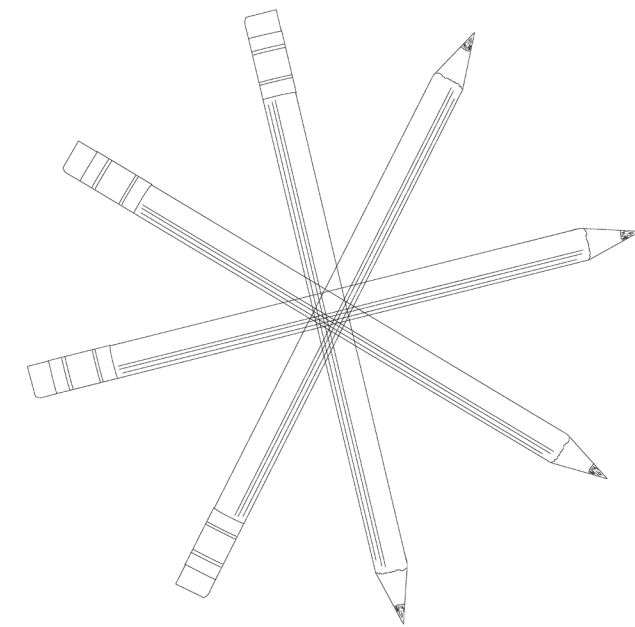
I've heard many times that a few moments are all it takes to define one's life. All my life needed was one. One terrifying, dreadful, soul-sucking moment. I'd pulled into a gas station to fill up after spending all my after-school hours at the university library. The quaint gas station had a small structure in the center with snacks and drinks... and a television. I'll never forget that television. It hung in the

northwest corner of the small gas station shack. That night it displayed the news, which contained a report out of Boston. The bold words scrolled across the bottom, and each one seemed to slam into my gut a little harder than the last.

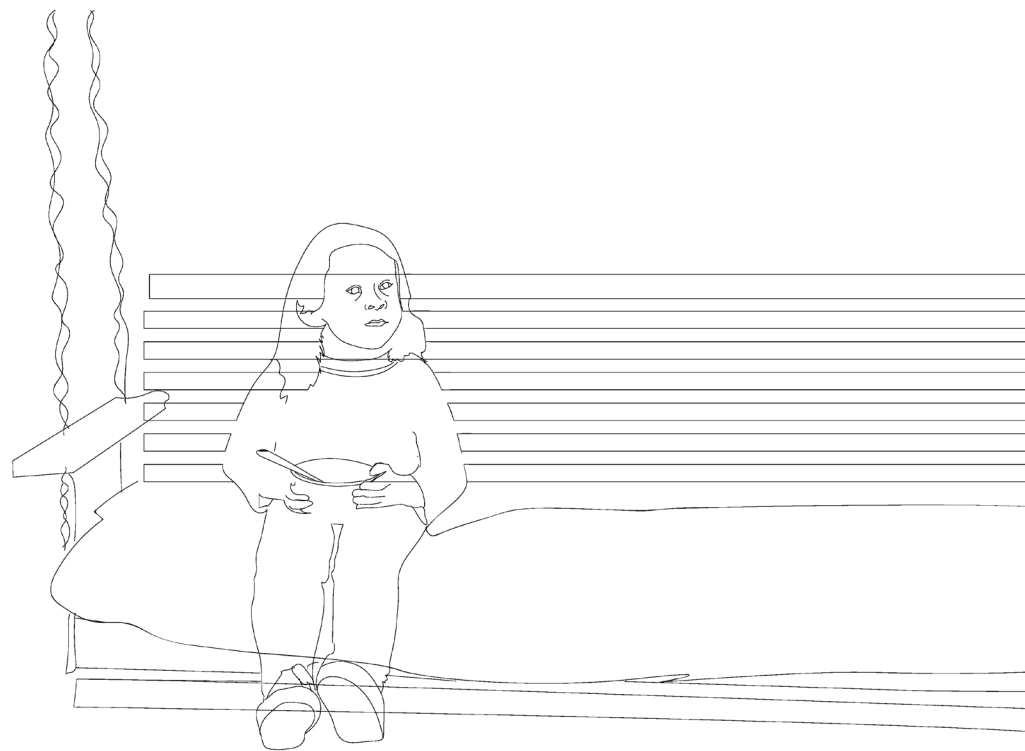
*Local youth dead on train tracks near Medford. More details to follow.*

I remember the feeling clearly, and yet it's impossible for me to describe. It was surreal, I know that for sure. The report didn't have a name, but something inside of me just knew it was Sam. It wasn't confirmed until later, when my dad texted and told me they had identified the body. It took my breath away again. I wasn't able to make it back for the funeral, but now I stand in front of his grave, his stone one of many that dot this clearing. Samuel David Harris 1996-2012. I doubt I'll ever stop questioning myself for the rest of my life, wondering if what I did was necessary or even right. I was the only one to ever hear Sam, and I was deaf. I remember feeling a duty to him, like I was the only one with the cure to his sickness. Maybe I wasn't right to feel that way—maybe it wasn't my place, and that's something that will be tethered to my heart for the rest of my life.

I kick aside a few leaves and look up from my friend's grave. The trees still bend in the wind, their branches stark against an ordinary blue sky. Except for the gentle sway at the tips of the branches, the forest around me is still, as if in reverence to his life, and what could have been. All is quiet, and I would have preferred to be alone here, but a few strangers have drifted in. They look much like me, reminiscent of past times, and I wonder what their stories are. Suddenly, a few of them look up, startled, and I think I know the reason. Those who live near Medford have probably heard it at least once in their lives, and for this deaf boy, I've heard it much, much more. The thought of it brings his face to my mind and brings me close to tears. It seems to reverberate off the trees and echo through the many hollows and creek beds. It crashes through the forest, demanding to be heard... the distant rattle of a train over its tracks.







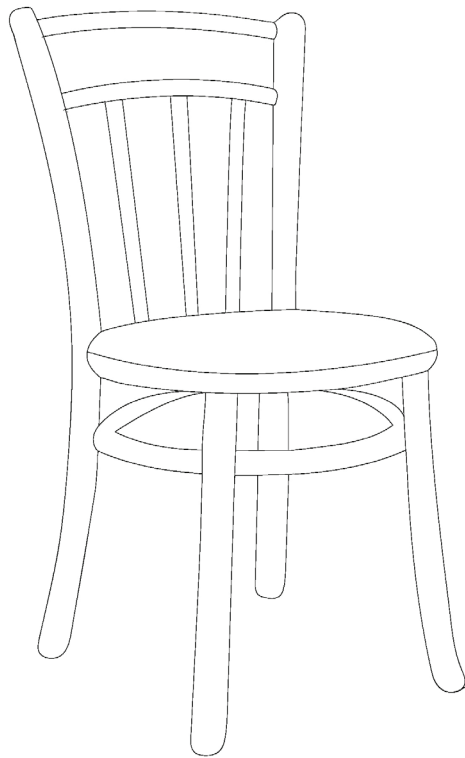
## Ryan Paul

Paige McQueen

You were two with pudgy hands  
And I was six in pigtails, and we  
Were too young to realize  
That first cousins couldn't marry,  
Even if they are best friends.

The sun shone bright that Saturday,  
Almost time for us to play,  
And so, I waited  
On the porch swing  
Back and forth  
Back and forth  
Back and forth  
I swung, my little legs pumping wildly.  
I sat on that swing for hours,  
Until a scream tore through  
The humid air  
And I learned for the first time  
In my six tiny years  
That life is like laughter,  
Glorious heaves of breath replaced  
With a tight black frilly dress  
Over black hose  
Above shiny black shoes.  
I learned that  
Sometimes the  
Ones we love the most  
Are the ones who leave the soonest.

You didn't live long,  
Little boy,  
But you lived wild  
In the meadows of Texas ranchland,  
Straw stuck in your hair and booster band  
Songs every Sunday morning.  
You didn't live long,  
Little boy,  
But your name is tucked inside  
Every page of my story.



## That Sturdy Chair

Kyle Ross

There is an old, sturdy wooden chair that sits  
Parallel to a large single-pane window in the kitchen  
Of my grandparents' house at 1708 Fair St.  
It's my grandfather's chair  
Grandad retired at an early age from selling insurance  
To take up a career of looking out that window  
Sitting in that wooden chair  
Part of me resented that chair  
How stagnant it was  
How it never left 1708 Fair

When I was younger, I needed big dreams  
Needed to do a whole lot  
Needed the competition amongst my closest friends  
Whom I worshiped for their ambition  
I wanted to wrestle down life, hold it under, and watch it submit  
Never understanding Caesar's "tragic flaw"  
All the while burning my grandfather's chair

Not seeing its sturdiness  
Not recognizing how well it held together  
Missing its fine grain and finish  
Looking through the attention to detail of its carpenter  
Oblivious to its strength under the weight of all those years

The older I get, the more I realize how similar Grandad and I are  
I'm glad he told me that there is nothing wrong with sitting in a chair  
Some folks are far too busy to watch through a window

