Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences
Division of Humanities

Digressions

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Editor’s Note and Acknowledgments

For those of you who don’t know me personally, I have a confession to make. I have an issue, maybe even bordering on psychosis with immortality because I believe that it is largely attainable. Perhaps this is why I’m an English major because the written word is the key to immortality; just think about it, Achilles, King Arthur and Alexander the Great? What makes them immortal? The stories and histories about them do, not their actions so much, but the written words preserving these actions keeps them alive.

As Editor-in-Chief of Digressions I’ve realized and learned so much about what it is to be a writer, a student at NSU and a leader. I can remember being an Editor on the staff two years ago and never once thinking I would be the Editor-in-Chief my senior year. But that’s the power the written word has that many of us never realize. It can make men and women immortal, bring new worlds to life, preserve cultures and civilizations long gone. It can do anything and for all of us aspiring artists and writers it starts here, in this magazine.

I would like to thank all the students who have submitted to the magazine. Without you, writers and artists Digressions would be nothing. For those of you who submitted and whose works did not make it into this issue, I can assure you it is a matter of space rather than quality because we receive so many great submissions, so do not get discouraged.

Dr. Ferriss, thank you for your guidance and support throughout this entire process and for believing in me. You are truly one of the unsung heroes behind each issue of Digressions.

Dr. Santos and the rest of the Humanities Staff, thank you so much for your help and support. With Digressions you have given to the students a platform to express ourselves through art and literature and that is one of the greatest gifts a University can provide to its students.

Sue, Britanny and Lacrima, thank you so much for the Layout assistance. This magazine would be nothing more than a folder of Word documents without your help.

Dan, Gabriello, Joe, Tyler, Juan G, Darlene, Genevieve, Juan M, Opal and Sabrina, although almost all of you were new to the staff this year your commitment and hard work as Editors made this issue the best yet and I can’t wait to see what all of you have in store for next year’s issue.

Most importantly, I would like to thank all of you, the readers of Digressions for your support. So, as you read this issue of Digressions just realize that what you hold in your hands is timeless; these written words are the fossils of civilizations because they say more about us than bones and remnants of pottery ever can. Enjoy this issue and help every contributor become immortal; and don’t worry, I’ve buried a couple issues around the country for the cause.

Christopher Garcia
Editor-in-Chief

Table of Contents

Ode to Happy Little Men Daniel J. King............................................. 4
Abracadabra! Ashley Allred............................................................. 5
Hummingbird Mikaela Myers............................................................ 9
Flip You Off, Send Off Victoria Rajkumar........................................ 10
Macabre Couch Lo Lei................................................................. 11
s’anamorphose Lacrima Nemulescu.................................................. 12
Caterpillar Lyle Howe.......................................................................... 13
With Starlight Eyes Christopher Garcia.......................................... 14
Crippled Alyssa Sterkel....................................................................... 16
Vogue Lauren Arigemma...................................................................... 17
Seniority’s Salvation Victoria Rajkumar........................................... 18
Alone in the Crowd Annette Taylor-Spence........................................ 19
Palm Randee McDonald........................................................................ 20
Attic Shade Lo Lei.............................................................................. 21
When it Rains Christopher Garcia..................................................... 22
When I Get to Valparaiso Juan Sebastian Gallo.................................... 23
Night into Day Darlene Frenette-Grubb............................................ 24
Weird Annette Taylor-Spence............................................................. 25
Waiting for Him Keren Moros............................................................ 26
Don’t Mind the Blood on the Floor Juan Sebastian Gallo..................... 31
Synergy Darlene Frenette-Grubb........................................................ 32
The Time We Lost Our Way Lacrima Nemulescu............................... 33
Colors Sabrina Talamo........................................................................ 34
Coagulation Dan Abella...................................................................... 35
Lights Juan Reyes............................................................................... 36
Nude Mikaela Myers........................................................................... 37
Perchance to Dream Hadrian Gores.................................................... 38
Lava Fall Grace Cox............................................................................ 40
Scenic Juan Reyes................................................................................ 41
From Childhood to Future Victoria Rajkumar..................................... 42
Hysterical Realm Lacrima Nemulescu.................................................. 44
Feathers Shantescia Hill................................................................. 45
Exile Juan Antonio Miranda............................................................. 46
They, Who are I Daniel J. King............................................................ 48
Ode to Happy Little Men
Daniel J. King

There is no bronze monument to happy little men,
No soot-swept portrait in a politician’s den,
On every marble immortal’s frozen face instead,
You’ll often find the spilling sigh of the lovely, youngly dead.

Or the plowed barren brow of the long-forgot mystery,
Or the damning glassy glare of the long-ignored history,
Or perhaps a serpent sneer, as if hissing to say,
“Trade your mortal troubles for our pithy passion play.
And join us now, the muted, the refuted, and the vain,
Scowling from the sky as our cratered memories wane,
And enjoy the pop-popping of your firecracker power.

“And gaze down from your mantle at those happy little men,
Who never owned a thousand, but loved their five or ten,
Waking up, making love, and then lying down to die,
And owing no tithe to tortured thoughts of why.”

I heard glass breaking. Without turning around I knew exactly what it was: our family portrait. It hung between the front door and window. My mother always touched the corner of the frame on her way out. I remember the day we took that picture. It was right before Christmas two years ago and we sat under a tree in the back yard. I usually avoided the camera, but it was important to her.

You should have seen how upset she was when my father spilled coffee on his newly starched shirt and had to wear one of his old ones. I didn’t really see the big deal; it was just a stupid shirt. He told her it was an accident, but I still thought I heard her crying in the laundry room as she tried to get the stain out.

I walked through the lawn (something my father hated) but today I didn’t care. I found myself stomping down the sidewalk without a destination in mind. All I knew was that if I stayed in that house a fraction of a second longer, I was going to burst.

The sun was beaming down on me so hard I had to wipe my forehead every few steps, and soon my shirt was soaked with sweat. I could feel it trickling down my back, pooling just above my waistband. My heart was running a marathon inside my chest. It was suffocating me, making it hard to breathe. I could feel it bouncing off my eardrums and radiating through my entire body. The pounding was so loud that for a second I thought someone behind me must have his iPod turned up too loud. I looked around; I was alone.

My legs could not keep up with the rest of my body and began to ache. I could feel my muscles twitching under my jeans. I almost stopped to catch my breath, but thought it better to walk it off and keep going. The pain began to fade, or maybe I just stopped feeling it.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a small shadow trailing slightly behind me. I tried to ignore it, but he was still there.

“When are you going to show me the dollar trick?” His chubby freckled face was sticky from the ice cream he held that was melting more quickly than he could eat it.

“Not today, Tommy.” I tried not to look him in the eyes.

“But, you promised!” He stomped his foot and I watched the jiggle travel up his leg.

“Yeah, but I didn’t promise I’d show you today. Now go home.”

“But...”

“Go HOME, Tommy!”

I walked away and left him standing on the sidewalk a couple doors down from his house. I caught a glimpse of him in the reflection of a parked car as he ran back to his porch. He was probably going to cry and tell his mother. I felt bad for being so mean to him: he was just a kid, but today was not a good
day. I made a note to apologize to Tommy and show him the damn magic trick as soon as I got back from wherever it was I was going.

I sat on the bus bench, my back leaning against some realtor’s plastic smile. I had no idea when the next bus was coming or where it was going, but I was getting on it. Reaching into my left pocket, I pulled out a brand new deck of cards.

I loved opening fresh cards. They sat perfectly flat against each other, and it was my job to break them in. I would shuffle the cards over and over again until they felt comfortable in my hands. But now, it was a chore. I took the first card off the top of the deck and stuck the rest back in my pocket. I flipped the card from one finger to the next, faster and faster, without thinking about it.

Ouch!

Paper cut. The card sliced through the web of skin between my fingers.

At first it was just a faint red line on my skin but the blood slowly began to pool. I squeezed my hand until I thought I felt the stinging fade, but as soon I let go it came rushing back.

The bus came to a screeching halt in front of me, kicking up a cloud of dirt. I could feel the tiny specks landing on my skin. The doors slowly creaked open and the bus driver gave me a look that told me she, too, was having one of those days.

“You comin’ or what?” she hollered as she popped her gum.

I lifted myself off the bench, stepped into the front of the bus and looked at all the faces staring back at me. There didn’t seem to be a single open seat on the entire bus. Great, I’m going to have to stand or scrunch in with some weirdo.

“Dollar fifty,” she demanded.

“What?”

“You deaf, kid? Dollar fifty,” she said as she slapped the toll machine.

Right, money. You have to pay to ride the bus. The thought of paying had never crossed my mind. How embarrassing. I was going to get kicked off, and I would be right back where I started.

I fumbled around and reached in my pockets, praying that I would find a couple of lonely dollars I may have forgotten about.

“I, um, the thing is …” I was panicking. I don’t know why, but I was nervous. It was humiliating to get kicked off the bus because you can’t scrounge up a measly dollar fifty.

“Check your shirt pocket.”

“Huh?” I had no idea what he was talking about.

“Check your shirt pocket. I saw you put your money in there from the window,” he replied, as he tilted his head towards the window and rapped on the glass with his fingernails.

Oh well, might as well humor the poor old shmuck. I reached into my shirt pocket and felt the familiar crinkle beneath my fingers. I pulled out a crisp five-dollar bill and held it up in amazement. The bus driver impatiently held out her hand, waiting for her share.

After I took my change, I proceeded to the only available seat, next to the weird old man. I sat down next to him, trying to keep my body from touching his. He smelled like Bengay. Old people always smelled like ointment. His curly white hair was spread sparsely over his pink spotted head. He was wearing faded black slacks, a wrinkled white button up shirt with yellowed armpits, checkered suspenders and a red bowtie.

We stayed quiet for the first couple of blocks, but soon I was too curious to keep my mouth shut.

“How did you know about the money?” I asked without looking at him.

“I told you, I seen you put it there.”

“That’s impossible. My money’s at home, I know exactly where I left it.”

“Then how did it get there?”

“You tell me!”

The old man shook his head as he let out a little giggle, and we stayed quiet for a few more blocks. I could feel myself getting angry. It was welling up in the pit of my stomach. First my parents and now this guy. There were lies swarming all around me. Why couldn’t anyone just tell the truth, for once?

The old man continued to talk, but I had stopped listening. I was still flipping that card furiously from finger to finger as I read all the graffiti on the back of the blue leather seat in front of me.

“So, you like magic?” the old man said as he turned his body to face me.

“What makes you say that?”

“You’re flipping that card pretty fast. Those are the hands of a magician.”

“Being able to do a few dumb tricks does not make someone a magician. Besides, I don’t do that stuff anymore.” I avoided his eyes as I spoke.

“Why not?”

“You ask a lot of questions.” I was hoping he would give it a rest, because I really didn’t feel like talking. But he gave a look that said he wasn’t giving up anytime soon.

“It’s just a bunch of lies, is all. I used to think I was amusing people with my stupid little tricks. But now I realize all I’m doing is lying straight to their faces.” I stopped flipping and started at the intricate blue pattern on the back of the card in my hands.

“Don’t you think it’s good to have a little mystery in life? What fun would it be if we knew everything about everything?”
“No. I’d rather have the truth. It’s the only thing that matters,” I replied, as I sat up straight and looked him in the eyes to show him I knew what I was talking about.

“What about when you were a child? Do you wish your parents told you there was no such thing as Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny?”

“It doesn’t matter if they would have told me then or let me find out on my own. The point is it’s all just an illusion. They brainwash us from the start with lies. They tell us it’s not good to lie, but they do it to us everyday. She always told me the truth was the only thing anyone needed, but she looked me right in the eyes and lied.” I had to turn away from his wrinkled face to fight back the tears. I could feel them on the rim of my eyes, sure to overflow at any moment.

“I have a feeling we’re not talking about magic anymore. So, what’s really bothering you, kid?” He could pry all he wanted; he wasn’t getting anything out of me.

“Oh come on, you can tell me. I don’t know you, or your family. Don’t hold back. What have you got to lose?” He was right.

“This morning I walked in and my parents were sitting at the kitchen table.”

“I don’t see what’s so unusual about that,” he interrupted.

“I noticed she wasn’t wearing her wedding ring. I don’t think I’ve ever seen her take it off. I could see the white outline on her otherwise tan finger. I asked them what was going on. The last time I had seen them with this kind of look on their face was in the principal’s office.”

“My mom just looked down at her hands. Her eyes were all red and swollen. They always told me how lucky I was to have two parents who loved each other. Damned liars!” I didn’t realize I was yelling. The few people left on the bus were all eyeing me, including the bus driver.

The old man sitting next to me put his hand on mine. When I looked up, I saw a look of compassion wash over his face. I don’t know why I told him. It figures that the first person I tell is some stranger on the bus. But then I was glad it was a stranger because then I didn’t have to worry about him gossiping to anyone about the day the family fell apart.

“It’ll be okay,” he said in almost a whisper. I knew he was right. It would be okay. He reached up and grabbed the cord hanging just below the top of the window and the brakes brought the bus to a halt.

“Well, this is my stop. Don’t stop believing, kid. If you take a closer look you’ll see that things aren’t always what they seem.” He walked off the bus and down the street.

I turned around to face a young boy sitting directly across the aisle from me, “Do you want to see a magic trick?”
Flip You Off, Send Off

Victoria Rajkumar

I hope to die on a Monday
And find peace upon a Sunday.
I’d have my tuxedo-colored limousines
Parade down the congested road obnoxiously.
(This one’s for you I95)

I am the lady of the hour.
The clock has stopped.
The. Clock. Has. Stopped.

I will travel to faraway lands on Tuesday
And make it home by Friday.
(It’s party night, ya know?)
They say the roads belong to the living,
Yet all the drivers are dead.

I am the lady of the hour.
The clock won’t move.
The. Clock. Won’t. Move.

I’ll have regrets on Wednesday,
But it’s nothing Thursday won’t forgive.
I can taste the oncoming Sunday,
I’m in need of the sugar rush.

I am the lady of the hour.
The clock won’t stop.
The. Clock. Won’t. Stop.

I’ll recover on a Saturday,
A day just for the family.
It’s bittersweet with a tinge of stress,
But we were born with rubber-band smiles.
(Say cheese!)

I was the lady of the hour.
The clock had stopped.
(Man, it sure felt that way)

I died upon a Monday
Holding up traffic and borrowed time.
No mortician could paint on satisfaction,
But believe me, it was there.

Death couldn’t catch Humor
(Someday!)
Hopefully, I am forgiven on a Sunday.

Macabre Couch

Lo Lei

I am sinking in a soft leather couch, drowning in cold currents
Under a white dry wall ceiling, a dim omnicolored sea
Illuminated by a placid sol, the collected animation from a screen of a million pixels.
Its surface evermore distant and trivial as the couch carries me further into the abyss
One arm has my cranium and another, the soles of my feet in a soft grip
I’m taken as an offering, on a valiant journey to nowhere in its unyielding grasp
As I plummet like an anchor I wonder
How much blood afforded this?
How much sweat poured from human brows?
This luxury to ignore my surroundings, completely.
And be jerked around by a farce...
As I lay with bloodshot eyes watching a dog kiss a girl in a pink beanie,
I speculate how many hours I have lain wasting in malcontent.
s’anamorphose
Lacrima Nemulescu
Mixed media

Caterpillar
Lyle Howe
Photograph
With Starlight Eyes
Christopher Garcia

She came to me with starlight eyes,
That begged for my affection.
And in the dark, I could still surmise,
This woman was perfection.

Amongst the fog and chilling air,
Our eyes seemed locked forever.
To keep your gaze on that night,
Was quite the long endeavor.

For you are not of this world,
A nymph or fairy perhaps.
Perchance a sprite or goddess,
Or an angel on relapse.

Regardless of your intentions,
I have made my own.
For when our eyes locked that night,
Your beauty had me blown.

What matters where you came from?
For two souls in love must trust.
That regardless of circumstance,
The love will not combust.

But that was long ago,
And since then life has been grand.
But now I sense something awry,
Something I cannot understand.

I often find you pacing,
And looking toward the sky.
As if something is pulling you,
And I fear our last goodbye.

One night as I was watching you,
Your starlight eyes gave voice.
I know your gaze well enough,
To know you’d made your choice.

Then with a kiss aimed at me,
You flew off the same way you came.
And in that moment I realized,
Life would never be the same.

And when our daughter asks,
“Daddy, where did mommy go”?
I will struggle to reply,
Because even I don’t really know.

So with tears in my eyes, I will say,
That “Mommy was a shooting star.”
And I hope she will find peace,
Knowing you are not so far.

I will tell her of the day we met,
So that she may always remember
That a star came into my life,
On a cold and dark December.

And before bed every night, before she gets tucked in,
The bedtime story will remain the same.
So that from her window you shall see,
She bears more than just your name.

For she looks to me with her mother’s eyes,
That beg for my love and affection.
And even in the dark, I can surmise,
That our daughter is perfection.

So Starlight, Star bright,
Know that I miss you dearly.
And as for the little image of you,
She misses you, sincerely.
Crippled
Alyssa Sterkel

Halted the fingers are. Shriveled, gnarled, wrinkled, unfruitful.

Time, the enemy, ceases the flow of art, leaving blank the papers that once were notebooks filled with scrawl.

Ink-spewed beauty of curves and crossed t’s on white pages.

Hands, the gateway of expression and deep images, lay desolate—

and useless. The paralyzed dance of pen and hand is, now, the only assurance.

Oh, how crippled the fingers are.
Seniority’s Salvation
Victoria Rajkumar

The morning of senior year’s birth,
I found my box of memories
Carefully wrapped in delicate white ribbon,
Knotted up like a tightened fist around a guilty neck.

Inside settled, nestled, were
Three years worth of sugar
spice, failed contraceptives, lies, broken
bottles and dried out promises.
You know, everything nice.

The absurdity of my misfortune
Is no cause for alarm.
Let’s just repeat the same mistakes
And beat them to death
Until they change their tune.
Like Rihanna did to Chris Brown --
Or am I telling the story wrong?

Hell is serenaded by school bells.
Violent fights in the name of what’s right.
(At least this week, according to MTV)
Doing anything to make a rhyme
Without having a reason for the line.
But hey! That was then and this is now.

I’m a senior.
(we’re practically adults)
Never mind that “so and so” is a total slut
Or that “him” and “her” are in a gang
Ready to blow the gay out of
the “lispy guy” who sashays in pink Vans.

Two girls named Unique act otherwise.
Instead, they write lists of all the chongas they despise
On squalid bathroom stalls; phone numbers and all.
Then wonder why their boyfriends won’t return their call.

Naturally, the math teacher fornicated with fractions.
In his attempt to get them to divide,
Another soul died on the inside.
He was never good with numbers,
Preferring to use his fingers instead.
Who said math wasn’t stimulating?

It was the morning of senior year
When I found my box of memories
Tied with lily-white ribbon,
In a meticulous fashion -- padlock secure,
As though to enslave a burning demon,
Serenaded by immutable school bells.

Alone in the Crowd
Annette Taylor-Spence

Amidst the buzz of the crowd
With others going to and fro
Somewhere there, is the abode
Of one who is alone—in the crowd

It is difficult to stand out in the crowd
Easier to blend in and get lost
In a private world the wanderer is trapped
Always feeling alone in the crowd

A large family—already a crowd
Add many friends to that bunch
Their presence desired and enjoyed
Yet one stands alone in the crowd

In a world of dreams away from the crowd
Viewing possibilities that may never be
Lost in books, in a writer’s world
Traveling in the mind—alone in the crowd
Attic Shade
Lo Lei

It is locked in the attic reinforced by three layers of oak
In the image of man but of barbaric darkness
Muscles taut and heavy with pounding footsteps,
Thumps short and brief causing dust to fall from above.
Whenever I visited the locks, I could feel it, lingering above
When I walked away, it would begin clawing at the hatch
Pull after failed pull, it slammed the floor and jumped furiously wall to
wall
Banging the walls with both fists.
It roared as if threatening to kill,
A sharp note in its climax that grilled my ears
When I feed it from the window I hear it garbling its grub
Always hobbling away from the light, away from the wind
I doubted it ever wanted to be free since it shied from the window.

It dawned upon me one day when I opened the door
As the banging shook the entire house, that it wanted me.
Yet I kept it, civilly, for all my father’s will and my father’s father
(And his father, too) Of whom they communally addressed “Friend in the Attic”
It has to be as old as sin
That or ageless, within its cursed den.
Never satisfied, always howling inviting nightmares to my eyelids
When I shrink away to my room in the corner to shake its quaking madness.
When it Rains

Christopher Garcia

The clouds begin to rumble,
And gather collectively.
This I have been waiting for,
Since last you left me.

My theory is not sound,
Or wise in any way.
But fools in love are marvels,
As poets, at the art of disarray.

So as the heavens gather,
To war above this earth.
I will attempt in madness,
To merit me some mirth.

As the dark skies warrant,
Me to take position.
Know that this endeavor,
Is of my heart’s volition.

So as the storm clouds roar,
I wait that ray of light.
And with metal rod pointed,
Stand ready to ignite.

Because your love is lightning,
And sets my heart ablaze.
May this metal rod be struck,
And the current send me in a craze.

For what Lightning can provide,
I seek this severe weather.
And for a moment I’m as alive,
As when we were together.

So when skin and current meet,
Allow my mind to construe.
So that, as I close my eyes,
I may open them…to you.

When I Get to Valparaiso

Juan Sebastian Gallo

When I get to Valparaiso and I look upon that sea
I’ll forget about those eyes that once looked back at me
When my fingers touch the sand that falls out of my hands
I’ll forget about my failures, like planes that couldn’t land
When I watch the ships roll in and leave again at night
I’ll forget how you rolled in, and then vanished out of sight
When the stars come out to shine and greet me with a smile
I’ll forget how much I hate this feeling, if only for a while
When I get to Valparaiso, and I walk along her streets
It’ll be like nothing happened, like I’ve never known defeat
When I’m riding up the cable car with people I don’t know
Full of curiosity, full of letting go
I’ll be looking in myself, at the beginning and the end
I’ll be thinking of you always,
And hoping it will mend
**Night into Day**  
*Darlene Frenette-Grubb*  
Oil on Canvas

**Weird**  
*Annette Taylor-Spence*

On a roller coaster ride was how time was spent  
Each day dawned with possibilities  
And by evening some hope went  
No guarantees – no promises  
Suspended in time  
Watching and waiting  
Minutes to hours  
Cherishing each moment  
Grasping every opportunity  
To do some deed  
Bring some joy  
Give comfort  
Surround with peace  
Then the ride stopped – everyone had to get off  
No longer soothed by the motion of daily activities  
Twenty four days of being up and down  
Then down and up not knowing which way to turn  
And in one moment – one final definitive moment  
The ride stopped – each his own path to follow  
Weird! This new environment  
Weird! Getting off that ride  
Weird! This pain in the stomach  
Weird! That nothing has changed when so much has  
Weird! Just weird! Weird - a funny word  
How else to describe an event that is strange  
An unfamiliar path never before trod  
Coping with a loss so sudden and grave  
Weird has a new meaning  
It is that indescribable feeling  
When everything inside you drops  
The moment the ride stops
Waiting for Him
Keren Moros

My job is a terrible place to meet men. Nearly every guy who walks in here already has a woman on his mind: either he’s madly, hopelessly and blindly in love, or he’s strangely obsessed with his mother. But I guess that’s what I get for choosing to work at Zales. After five years here, I’ve come to realize that I should have started working here after finding my soul mate.

I specialize in engagement rings, so I have to go through the light torture of seeing happy people in love all the time. But despite this, I really do love my job, because I have a gift for helping these people. I only need the guy to talk to me about his girlfriend for a few minutes, and then I can lead him to the gem that perfectly expresses his feelings. I usually get it right within the first three tries. When he actually brings the girl, I get it right the first time.

But one guy changed all that when he came every week for three months. He compared diamonds and settings and cuts and carats with a passion that I hadn’t seen in a long while. He claimed he’d been to every jewelry store in the county. Last week, he finally decided on a radiant-cut one-carat diamond between two smaller radiant-cut diamonds with round diamonds around the white gold band. Even though the store had a sale on radiant-cut diamonds that day, he insisted on paying full price. He didn’t want to be even remotely cheap when it came to buying an engagement ring for the love of his life, Angela, whose name suits her because he said she was his angel.

I had wished him luck and had told him to let me know how the proposal turned out. I was only half serious because once they find the perfect ring, they don’t come back unless something goes wrong. And after getting to know this guy, I knew that there was no chance of that. He was genial, good looking and intelligent. Those types of men never come back to Zales.

I’m thinking of him right now because another guy is walking out of the store with the same ring. It happened to suit his girlfriend perfectly, too. I sigh happily, proud of my work, and look over the list of the new rings, which came in this morning.

“But today, his shoulders are hunched forward, his face is drawn and his eyes are languid and dark. His hands are stuffed in his coat pockets, as if he’s bracing himself for an impact or shielding himself from something, and he’s frowning.

“Remember me?” he asks. His upper lip trembles slightly as it fails to attempt a lop-sided smile. “Mr. No-that’s-still-not-the-right-ring?” She didn’t dare, I think, as I quench the smile fueled by customer-service habits and nod solemnly instead.

“Can I help you?” I ask, my voice pitching down with bleakness. His hand moves in his pocket. “I’m here to return the ring,” he says, dropping a heavy hand on the counter and sliding the small black box and his credit card across the glass.

I gasp softly as my mouth drops open.

For any other client, I would give a cool “Right away, sir” and give him his money back with a sympathetic smile. But this guy is practically a friend after so many hours of talking.

“She—?”

“She said no,” he interrupts bitterly, and his sullenness seems to rise. He rolls his lips as if he’s trying to bring the words back into his mouth. “And she laughed, too. Not a lot. But she did chuckle a few times.”

“Ouch,” I say, hating her for a moment. “I’m so sorry.”

“Yeah, me, too.”

His words take me back to dozens of sad movies I’ve watched. But this isn’t a movie, and my sympathy is real.

He seems to be hesitating to say more. “She—she said she had something to tell me, and I told her I did, too. I wouldn’t have insisted on going first if I had known that she was about to break up with me.”

“May I ask why? I don’t want to be nosy, I just . . . care.” I say the word carefully, hoping he won’t think I’m trying to intrude.

“She just doesn’t feel that we’re compatible,” he says, shaking his head and looking down at the gems, which are depleted of the promise they held for him only last week. “She said she wants a different life and that she’s come to understand that I’m not her type—and a bunch of other nonsense about how lucky we’ve been to know each other.”

I look down. “I’m sorry,” I say again, feeling pathetic because it’s the only thing that’s coming to my mind to say. “I can tell you really love her.”

His eyebrows go down as he looks at me briefly. “I do love her. Everything I was planning for our future has gone down the drain,
and now it’s empty, you know? These rings don’t even sparkle anymore.”

I nod. “Without the feeling of knowing it’s going to represent the biggest thing in your life, they’re just pretty rocks.”

“So now I’m like a rock that’s just sitting there with no purpose.”

I don’t know what to say to that, and it’s pointless to say sorry again, so I decide to concentrate on the reason he’s here.

“I can give you a full refund.”

He doesn’t look up. “Thank you.”

The register is right near us, so I only move about a yard away from him.

“How often do you see this?” he asks, as if assuring himself that he’s not the only loser on the planet. “You know—guys like me who have to return rings.”

“I’ve lost count,” I say. “It’s not uncommon, unfortunately.”

“Do they ever come back wanting to buy another ring?”

“There’s been a few,” I answer, continuing to make the transaction. “I think most of them feel that coming to the same store will give them bad luck or something.”

“Yeah—yeah, I guess you’re right.”

As I finish up, I feel a tug at my heart to give him something more than just my sympathy. And I decide to say what’s really on my mind, no longer caring whether or not it’s any of my business.

“If I may,” I start slowly. “I don’t think that you should blame yourself. If she had already been thinking about this, there was nothing that you could’ve done.”

He glances at me and twists his head. “But there has to have been something. I just don’t understand how I—” He bites his lip and looks down, and I wonder how much emotion he’s holding back.

“I don’t think that you should blame yourself. If she had already been thinking about this, there was nothing that you could’ve done.”

He leans closer to him and lowers my voice to a half whisper.

“You can’t understand how you couldn’t keep her, and you hate yourself for it. It’s only natural. You’re not the first man to have felt this way. But I know that you did everything in your power to make her happy and to love her and make her the center of your world. You’ve told me. But when you give and give, and you don’t get anything back, it’s time to move on. Sadly, you had to realize it this way. But if you hadn’t, it would’ve been worse later. It would’ve hurt more.”

A few seconds of silence pass by as he stares at the displays, and I see the diamonds giving his eye the sparkle that was there last week.

“I keep wondering what went wrong,” he says, chewing his words. “Then I think of the millions of times when I saw that she had doubts about our future. But I ignored them. I told myself everything was going to be okay.”

“Do that when we’re in love.” I glance down at the diamonds, which are now empty and cold to me, too.

His heartbeat is making me admire him even more because he’s told me their story. I know of all the sacrifices he’s made for her and all the dreams he had for them.

He takes his gaze off the diamonds and looks straight into my eyes, making my heart stop for two seconds.

“I don’t know if I can move on.”

I dare to smile.

“You will. The heart heals, and one day you’ll meet with a girl who will give you as much as you give her. Happened to my brother after his girlfriend of six years dumped him.”

He smiles, but just a bit. It’s more like a wince.

“So it’s not hopeless?”

I shake my head as I hand him his credit card and keep my hand in his.

“We’re human. I believe love is celestial. That’s why so many people get it wrong. But you’re one of the few who’s got it right because you know it’s a commitment. You don’t stop halfway, and that’s what every girl wants.”

His hand closes over his credit card and my hand for a moment, but he quickly pulls it away when he realizes it.

“I have to go,” he says, stuffing the credit card into his pocket.

“Sorry I took so much of your time.”

“Don’t apologize. You’ve never wasted my time.”

His face looks brighter as he says, “That’s good because you’ll see me again. My grandmother’s birthday is in six months, and I want to get something special for her. She’s going to be one hundred years old.”

“Wow, I bet she’s had a great life.”

He nods and then lowers his eyebrows. “Do you just sell engagement rings?”

“Well, I specialize in engagement rings. But I can sell anything here.”

“Good. I don’t want to buy my grandmother’s gift from anyone else.”
The exhilaration at hearing that statement causes me to take a deep breath and smile.

“I appreciate that.”
“Thanks for everything. What you said—I really needed to hear it.”

He turns around and starts walking out. Then he stops suddenly and turns back.

“What’s your name again?”
I don’t mind that he’s forgotten again. After all, he’s been obsessed with another woman for three years.

“It’s Amber. Amber Lewis.”
“I’m Brett Richmond.”

I say his name at the same time he does, and he nods sheepishly as if he’s realizing that it’s obvious that I should know his name after three months and after looking at his credit card.

“You know, you’re the nicest jewelry store worker I’ve met in the past couple of months, and I’ve met a lot of them.”
I give a warm smile. “Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. See ya.” He holds himself a bit straighter as he walks out.

I keep looking until he’s in his car and gone, and even though I know I have to get back to work, I can’t concentrate. The only thing I can think of is that he’s going to come back.

And it strikes me suddenly—I’m in love with him. Somewhere between the first time I saw him and the moment I wondered why she said no to him, I fell in love with him.

He’ll be back for his grandmother’s present, and after that I might never see him again.

But we’ll talk when he comes, and his wounds will have started to heal.

And maybe that will lead to his coming back on his own—not because of jewelry, but because of me.

I shake that last thought out of my head. It’s better to not get carried away. The only thing I’ll concentrate on is the fact that he’s coming back.

And when he does, I’ll be right here waiting for him.

Don’t Mind the Blood on the Floor
Juan Sebastian Gallo

Oh, don’t mind the blood on the floor!
It will dry eventually.
Just step over it while I wipe this sleeve clean.
Oh, there it is again.
It seems every time you lie, the bleeding commences.
Oh, this silly heart of mine,
can you not control yourself?
You’re embarrassing me, dripping everywhere like this!
But, as I was saying, don’t mind that blood on the floor there.
There’s only so much blood in a man anyway. This can’t go on forever, At least I hope not.
But what am I saying?
You don’t mind at all, do you?
In fact, if I were a betting man, I would say you quite enjoy it.
I’m only saying that because I did catch you once or twice peering into it to catch your reflection.
Oh, you fiddled with your hair and giggled and then walked away from my blood there on the floor.

Hahahahahahahahaha
How silly of me to feel I need to remind you of my blood there by your feet.
Anyway, let’s just ignore the elephant in the room.
I know this could be awkward but let’s not make it so. We’re both adults.
Now, where were we?
Oh yes! You were lying to me.
Ooops! There it goes again. Drip, drip, drip.
Synergy
Darlene Frenette-Grubb
Oil on Canvas

The Time We Lost Our Way
Lacrima Nemulescu
Photograph
Gray nights are passing through
Faster than a beating heart.

The sun had ceased to shine,
No rainbows in the dark.

All has now turned silent
As flowers fill the room.

Some were pink and violet,
Others were maroon.

Her cheeks no longer red,
Her beige skin has turned white.

Her body now lies dead.
She somehow lost the fight.

Her smile has turned into a frown.
Her glow has gone away.

Her hair which once was brown
Has faded and decayed.

Her lifeless body has turned stale.
Her black heart now lies cold.

All her colors have turned pale.
No trace of color—not even gold.

The streaming sands within the curving glass,
Quick days piled high to form earth’s aging years,
Flow crimson-stained and reeking. Globs of blood
Mix deeply, staining yellow grains with greed
And vice and sin. Historic dates we chant
In schools are corpses’ births: chaotic wars
Engulf young men and feast upon their pride,
Disgorging bones and guts and blood and guns
That, stitched like Satan’s quilt, obscure the land.

The morning’s paper speaks of monsters deep
Within ourselves, that stare green-eyed and seek
To claim what slips their bony, clinging claws,
And tempt the mind to move the hand and steal
A purse that dangles like the flesh from which
It sways, or beat to death the pretty face
That bubbles up a pool of clotting blood.

Clandestine lay the true foul beast whose death
Shall never come. Behold the ancient man
Who vaults the village walls and forests green,
Who’s panicked-toed and panting dry his lungs
And resting on a narrow path that runs
Along a mountain’s base. He gazes down
At his two hands, his fingers shaking off
Wet blood he earned through thought and violent will.
And from the breath of mind he speaks a truth
Of flawed design, a creature built on dust alone.
He screams mutely what lips and tongue cannot:
“Forsaken life! I’m human after all!”
Lights
Juan Reyes
Photograph

Nude
Mikaela Myers
Mixed Media
Perchance to Dream

*(Inspired by H.P. Lovecraft’s poem, “To a Dreamer”)*

As I lay my form here down to sleep
I wonder of what forms shall I see
covering the night sky of dream.

Shall I sing to the muse,
ask a question bereft of ruse,
of what awaits me in
the realm of doze?

Ah, but she comes already,
herald of what should come soon,
for at last I hear the drawl of the loon,
as I enter the realms of a darkened noon.

So what shall I see tonight, O muse of night,
grand sights of gold and azure to amuse,
or splendid ’scapes of vine and tangle to peruse?

“Nothing here so,”
said she of emerald locks,
ruby skinned cast
with onyx orbs purer than nox.

Then what are you,
when I should be with my lady,
of splendorous looks,
and seeming seelie vistas?

And she began,
“I am the sad blue
found on dim days’ frond,
my harpsichord is discord,
of such that Eris herself is fond.”

“I am the dark of Nyx’s embrace,
the very essence of sleep I do not waste,
Erebus’ gleam is my means,
for which I extract my trade.”

And she said these things so unseelie so,
that I knew that of the natural world she was, no,
a creature of dankest pit,
an enemy of Titania and a friend of immortal sin.

And I knew of her form then,
as a Master knows a carefully trained animal,
from infancy to the cage,
an animal as collectable as fine wine,
the kind that does not ripen with age.

Thus I knew my own folly then,
to think that in perfect thoughts I had thought
that a bad thing would never come to knock at the door,
and rest itself upon my shade to make its talons wet,
and kill a calm mind already well set.

And I was taken with what my torture vile would then be,
to wondrously not see again the sights of azure and pearl,
to gratefully never smell again the teak and blue woad,
to mercifully not touch again the silks and folds,
or endlessly hear again the call of a tiring thing,
nor feel again the peace,
of good thoughts dreamt,
in sleep.
Lava Fall
Grace Cox
Mixed Media

Scenic
Juan Reyes
Photograph
My aunt’s home was my sanctuary. I remember listening to the sound of the fan in the corner of the room, hearing it turn, a low hum, feeling pleased as it gently blew the cool air in my direction, brushing my parched skin for mere seconds. A tease. I heard the sound of the ice cream truck driving down the block, Für Elise, reminding me of the passing 4 o’clock afternoon and the tiniest pleasure that was childhood. The birds were calling, an array of languages. The bluejays harped a sharper tune, while the mocking birds chimed sweetly a similar melody. I heard the passing cars in the distance and the laughter from the neighbor’s children through the open window.

The sheets on the bed smelled like Downy and summertime breeze. The pillow was pricking the back of my head, ten thousand feathers, more bothersome than comfortable. The surrounding air was so steamy you could taste the Miami heat. The only relief from the scorch was the teasing fan doing its roundabout. Any second now it would come my way once more. The sunlight was peeking through the vertical blinds, which were a horrid shade of beige. The brightness of the beaming sun stung my eyes; it was such a joyful presence.

I recall my tongue being parched, as was my throat. With every humid breath I took I could taste tiny traces of sweet dust billowing around the room. I stared in wonder at the dust particles, watching them dance in the sun’s spotlight. It was finally their chance, and they were putting on quite the show. The afternoon glow suited them as they twirled in slow, graceful circles, capturing the sunlight and returning rainbows.

The scent of ramen noodles lingered in the air from an earlier lunch and the homely scent that one can never seem to name invaded every crevice of the room. The scent is human, a sign that life existed within those walls and it was content with being there.

Many years have passed, but time does not cool the burn of Miami weather. I have returned to my aunt’s home for a casual visit laced with awkward conversation. I am introduced to a place much different from what I left behind so long ago. “Modern” and “remodeled” are words thrown around like confetti. Upon entry, where time failed to mask the heat, the new central A/C mastered. The air was cold, unreal and hospital-like in essence. Recycled air. Newly upholstered, unwelcoming, furniture bids you to take a brief seat.

I sit on the edge of the deep maroon sofa, adorned with too many pillows in three unsightly shades of brown, and keep my hands on my lap. I take a deep breath of chilled air, so much so that it made my nose and throat burn just a bit. There is a new, unfamiliar scent; while not altogether unpleasant it was not one I’d wish to inhale again. It was pungent and fruity, the kind of smell you could purchase in a dollar store can of air freshener. It too was artificial and uninviting, I felt a bit inclined to return the smell for fear of having trespassed.

As my aunt prepared tea in the kitchen (which was also labeled as “altered”), I searched for the memory I once knew, an old friend kept away for far too long. Yet, despite my efforts, not a single trace was left for me to embrace. Was I dreaming? It was late afternoon, but I could not hear the sound of Für Elise coming down the block or the neighborhood children engaged in play. No, it was gone. The children had since grown up and moved away. Silence, it appears that the birds have taken leave as well, not a single tune was playing. All I could hear, no matter how hard I listened, was the A/C’s high-powered rumble through the vents.

Through the heavily curtained window I looked for the joyful dust, eager to see the particles perform in the sunlight for me once more. The newly installed awning made it certain that the intrusive sun would keep its cancer to itself. If light were to enter, it would be from the “green” lightbulbs that twisted into one odd shape and shined their too-bright blue-ish fluorescent glow. I looked down at the wooden floor and thought of my memory, of the life that once existed here. Peering up I could now see that what was once here had left many years ago, perhaps with me. Brand new furniture, HD television and a computer workstation that had replaced the dinner table mocked me from my seat.

My aunt returned with cups of tea in Starbucks logo mugs. I wondered about her “fine china” floral tea cups (chipped in places but were always sturdy) and their disappearing act. We chatted for a bit, nothing like what I could remember and eventually I got up and made my leave. As I hugged and kissed her goodbye, I glanced over her shoulder into a home I once knew. I wondered, just what was I to expect on my next visit? I left with the disappointment of knowing that no matter what was to come it would never be what was.
Feathers

Shantescia Hill

My skin never seemed so soft until you touched it
Your fingers are like feathers falling along my body
Trying not to melt away into you
Trying not to love every sensation
Trying to pull away
No I just can't
My breath never became so shallow until I felt your breath

Like feathers upon my neck
Looking into you is staring into the ocean so deep, so dark
A sea of hidden pain, hidden emotion
Let the wind take it away, let it go
Float back to me light as a feather
Touch me breathe touch me
Burning desire engulfs me
Cooling me down with your eyes you kiss me a sweet kiss goodbye
Exile

Juan Antonio Miranda

I am what many seek,
and many more claim;
the purest delight
 tainted by wily hands.

I have travelled for miles–
lost in endless pursuit,
as Day and Night
quarrel over the sky;
Day with fierce power,
Night with seductive charm.

Across jagged rocks my feet
paint a warm clotty trail
for those condemned to my fate.

The heat lashes into my flesh,
adding torment to my grief,
as salt seeps into my wounds.

I let loose a cry
fiercer than the lion’s roar,
fouler than the hyena’s howl.

I roam alone,
fear stabs men’s hearts
---unable to vacate the flesh—
upon my appalling sight.

They call me monster, wretch, fool—
such treacherous names.
But as far as I see,
man is a far more ghastly beast than me.
I speak with love,
they fight with hate.

I yearn for peace,
they lust for war.

My eyes flutter as a gust of sand
tightens my throat.

Squinting,
I understand my aim—
pursue my path
through nasty terrains,
warning man time and time again,
of the evils staining his hands.

Man labels me monster, wretch, fool—
with opened eyes
he would realize—
I was never an enemy.

I roam alone,
clothed in wounds,
bathed in blood,
lusting for that glorious day
man unifies as one,
living on,
realizing TRUTH
has yet to come.
In a solemn channel between day and morrow,  
I sat, head in hands, nursing the broken pieces  
Of anguish I was not allowed to scream.

What cause for this? There was no peril,  
Nor castigation, nor loneliness, no…  
Tormented from within, by within, I knew  
I had to journey inward, to find the spring  
From which sprung pain and the sea  
Where I might see solace, at last.

And so I sought my Virgil in my starry wood,  
And found him there. Tall, handsome fellow,  
With stubble on chin and hair unkempt,  
Benignly sloven. He beckoned to me with a nod,  
Leaning ’gainst a tree, unhurried, unworried,  
Comfortable to breathe in the dusty morning  
Of the now rising sun. Saturday was his name.

“Can you guide me?” I asked. He sighed, shrugging.  
“There’s nowhere you need to be,” he said,  
“Why spoil the moment, always back and forth,  
Forward and reverse, how tiring.” Morose,  
He blew out his breath, unwilling to do more.  
“Please,” I said, “I need to know what I am, and why.”  
He closed his eyes, and smiled despite himself.  
“Very well,” said he, “Your despair is right before you,  
If you would only care to look.” So I looked.

A man, grey beyond his years. Grey in hair,  
Grey in face, grey in thoughts, grey in spirit.  
He stood over a desk, back bent from the weight  
Of many arms with many burdens. Spiderlike,  
His eight arms hurried through their paper tasks,  
This one stopping to wipe his wrinkled brow,  
That one stopping to pound the desk in frustration,

As he muttered through cobwebs in his throat,  
“Not enough, not enough, not enough, not enough.”

Horrified was I by this sight, yet on Saturday’s face,  
Mere disgust. “That’s what’s inside you,”  
He said, with a gesture, “That’s what keeps you  
Angry and afraid.” I shook my head, unaccepting,  
Even as tears of clarity spilled from my eyes.  
“That can’t be me,” I said. Saturday chuckled.  
“It is,” he said, “But it isn’t all of you.”  
Then he gestured the other way, and I followed.

There, sitting in the foremost pew, hands clasped  
Before the sacraments and the lights of that holy place,  
Was a different man, youthful beyond his years.  
After one more moment of silent gratitude,  
He lowered his hands and opened his eyes, smiling at me  
As he put his glasses back on. Valentine, the peaceful.  
“Don’t fear,” he said, rising to meet me, “God walks  
Beside you even when your mind refuses him.  
He is your friend, always, regardless of what faith  
You have in yourself.” As I heard these truthful words,  
I felt a presence beside me, infinitely patient.  
And I knew that I had been bad to my faithful friend,  
For forgetting his gentle sustenance so often.  
But still, my searching thoughts needed answers.

“Please,” I said, “How do I defeat this poison inside me?  
These things are blades of glass, I do not see them  
Until they are marked by my blood.” Valentine  
Put a hand on my shoulder. “Have faith, young one.  
Look how far you’ve come already. You’ve survived  
Darker times than these, and come through stronger.”  
“Darker times than these,” I repeated, and saying it  
I felt the Earth slide forward, and myself back,  
Falling through time to an eternity recently ended,  
Yet so alien now. There he was, the teenaged thing  
Which refused all humanity, dressed in the darkest dyes,  
Hair wild over a face with shattered eyes and
Grinding teeth. One by one he nailed the bodies 
Of strangers to the walls of his cell. He drove 
The rusty spikes with his bare hands through 
Flesh and bone, crucifying the masses for the 
Rejection he blamed them for, so that the walls 
Dripped and drenched with the blood of people 
He had never given a chance to give him a chance.

Then his shattered eyes saw me, and his hands 
Tightened around another rusty spike. He did not 
Recognize his future self, and would have refused 
To believe it anyhow. He knew only to defend, 
To destroy, to kill in his heart what his mind 
Labeled impossible. He came at me with the spike— 
Ankle deep in his bloody hell I had nowhere to run— 
I screamed, and two arms pulled me away.

I came to on the shore, sand between my fingers 
And the ocean in my ears. My savior sat 
Next to me, legs drawn up to his chest, 
Chin resting on his knees. His fluffy hair 
tossed about in the salt breeze, and from his back 
A pair of snow white wings huddled close for warmth. 
An angel without a halo, his name was Feather.

“Thank you for saving me,” I said. He sighed, 
My gratitude sliding off his self-deprecating 
Exterior. “You should stay out of the past,” 
He said, “There’s nothing for you here.” 
“There must be something to learn from it all,” 
I ventured. He replied, “Only to keep looking 
Forward.” He sighed again, “I’m not the right person 
To ask. There might be some inspiration yet 
From the person you always wanted to be.” 
He pointed inland to a little bandshell, 
A modest venue, between a gift-shop and a row 
Of parking meters. People walked by, touring 
Up and down the beach. A few sat in front of the 
Bandshell just to take a rest and send a text.

But the young performer before them took little notice 
Of his audience. All the stage was his world.

He was wearing two denim vests, one open, 
One closed, and a pair of dark sunglasses with a 
Kamikaze sun on a sash tied above on his forehead. 
He was singing forgotten songs with all his heart 
Into a microphone that was not plugged in. 
But that was an irrelevant detail. His name was 
Jimmy Jimmy, and he was a jester marionette 
Holding his own shining strings and dancing.

At the end of his song he received a modest applause, 
And he bowed with a grand sweep of his arm. 
As I walked up to the stage, he jumped down, 
Landing on his feet, a feline child at heart. 
My reflection in his sunglasses mused, 
“So rarely was I you. So rarely, so free.” 
He tilted his head, raising an inquisitive eyebrow. 
“You were always free,” he said, “And you always are.”

“I was always afraid,” I replied, “And I still always am. 
I don’t even know if I can dream as big as you did.” 
Jimmy Jimmy nudged his sunglasses down 
So he could wink a dazzling eye at me. “Just watch,” 
He said, and jumped back onto the stage. 
As his feet hit the floor, twenty years went by. 
The boy became a man, and the man, a better man. 
Now Dr. King looked out over a captive audience 
Of wide-eyed college faces. He wore a fine 
Collared shirt with a fine pair of pants, too cool for a tie. 
He sized up his mewling herd with a knowing grin. 
The tired whiteboards behind him bespoke 
A tangled mess of facts, maps, and figures 
Sharpened and scrawled in multicolored marker. 
The class was not here for the notes, however. 
They were here for the man. And the man knew 
When to hold them and when to let them go. 
“Class dismissed,” he said. And the world changed.
Then without missing a beat, he smiled down at me,
Folding his arms and leaning against his podium.
I nodded, “This is what I want.” He replied,
“This is what you could be if you live your
Life without flinching. I am the best of you, like
Valentine and Jimmy Jimmy. Your future fears
Have not yet materialized. You have not yet chosen
To compromise who you are, to back down, to hide.”
“Can compromise be avoided?” I asked, eyes narrowed.
“Maybe,” he replied, “Maybe not. But it’s up to you
Either way. Just remember that fear’s worse than failure.
True success lies in having cared, and having dared.”
He glanced at his watch, there was work to be done,
Mountains to move, just as with me in the present.
Yet he smiled, and his back was straight, and strong.
He chose the mountains, and the mountains were scaled.
He put on a pair of sunglasses, praying silently his thanks,
As he left the room for a future far beyond my sight.

At that I returned from my visions, and breathed.
The world was new and vast around me.