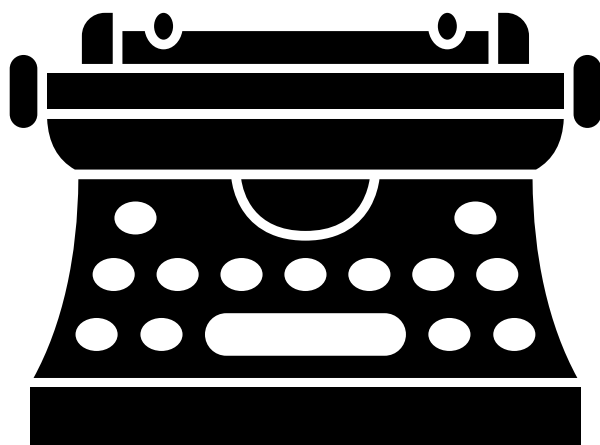


Black & White

Literary Journal
of the Arts



Volume 13
2023

Letters from the Editors

Dearest readers,

Working on Black & White has been quite an experience this year! I'm so grateful that I was given this opportunity to grow as a literary leader in Student Publications and that I had the support of many friends during the creation of this issue.

Working on Black & White has taught me a lot, but my number one takeaway has been learning to trust my team. I'm so used to taking on a lot when it comes to group projects because I've had to work with unenthusiastic people in high school and the beginning of college. I'm so glad that Black & White was not like that. Since I took this position, I wanted to make this a collaborative process. While I unfortunately couldn't plan enough in advance to involve many people in the editing process, I turned that around with the design process. I'm so grateful to the e-board and general members who stepped up to create this issue with me. Adobe Express is not a very friendly platform for planning out printed volumes, but it allowed us to work on this experience together. And obstacles are always worth facing when you're facing them with friends!

In this issue, you'll find many beautiful pieces of writing. I, along with everyone else at Student Publications, am eternally grateful to every student who submitted their work. We couldn't have done this without you. And whether you want to admit it or not, you're a writer, and you're published. And that's very cool!

Letters from the Editors

Before I leave you, I have to give a very important thank you to my right hand (wo)man during this process: Alivia Stonier. I wasn't close with Alivia until this semester, and getting to know her this year was one of the best decisions I've made so far. I'm so glad that we've been able to bond over this experience! I'm looking forward to continuing our partnership next year :)

And with that, be free, dear readers! Show some love to the authors if you can, and never stop appreciating art made by wonderful, stellar, incredible human beings.

Warmest of regards,
Michelle Rochniak

Editing this edition of Black & White was my first time getting to work with a team on putting together student work for a magazine. I couldn't ask for a better team or a better process in doing this as a creative endeavor. How do you speak for the entire team when I say that I hope you love these pieces as much as we do and enjoy the process of going through the beautiful writing that the students at WCSU have been able to craft.

Sincerely,
Alivia Stonier

Black & White Staff



Michelle Rochniak
Managing Editor

Alivia Stonier
Editor/President

Meaghan Canavan

Sarah Marsh

Sara Risko

Danielle Simms

Aidan Barton

Matthew Sterk

Layout & Design Team

Brian Clements
Faculty Advisor

Printed by Economy Printing; Danbury, CT
Produced with the help of WCSU SGA funds

Cover design by Sarah Marsh

Table of Contents

“trying/drowning” by Danielle Simms.....	1
“The Places I Want [...]” by Ash Muzzillo.....	2
“Overthinking” by Alivia Stonier.....	3
“is it not enough [...]” by Meaghan Canavan.....	4
“other side of the rainbow” by Danielle Simms.....	5
“Stomping Out [...]” by Meaghan Canavan.....	6
“The Marked” by Alivia Stonier.....	7-12
“Polyglot’s Lament” by Campbell Mitchell.....	13
“My Father, Variegated:” by Simone Swart.....	14
“Congratulations” by Campbell Mitchell.....	15
“A Memoir to Never [...]” by Anonymous.....	16-19
“braised rabbit and fine wine” by Tyler Munroe..	20
“a vintage hug” by Michelle Rochniak.....	21
“verse xxii - a worldly attraction” by S. Moni.....	22
“It Would Still Be You” by Meaghan Canavan.....	23
“your favorite girl” by Johssa Daniels.....	24
“spring foliage” by Michelle Rochniak.....	25
“Window Shopping” by Johssa Daniels.....	26
“Making Small Talk” by Campbell Mitchell.....	27
“Looking from the Outside” by Matthew Sterk....	28
“Sea Urchin” by Ana Bourque.....	29
“Call of the Sea” by Meaghan Canavan.....	30
“Dreams of Swan Lake” by Matthew Sterk.....	31
“Sandcastles” by Campbell Mitchell.....	32-33
“Blue Avenues” by Dan Silva.....	34-39
“verse xxv - kun fayakun” by S. Moni.....	40-41

trying/drowning

there's this feeling I get when I wake in the morning.
6:37, the sky is a pale, empty void of blue
and with tired eyes I faintly believe today will be different.
today is the day I become
something meaningful
something great
someone with an attachment to make the world feel real—past
the pangs of resentment in my stomach
then, with one uniform movement, almost as if it were a reflex
I face the wall, close my eyes
and dance with my imagination

The Places I Want to Escape to

your arms
the garden
my grandmother's lap
the forest
the highway
my consciousness
the bookstore
the astral plane
a fiction world
a world of my own creation
death
the next life
somewhere else
anywhere else
anywhere I don't have to listen to my thoughts -
they're so loud, you know.
Even when I was in the hospital,
on narcotics strong enough to
knock you out,
my body was limp
but my mind was still running.
My body is easily exhausted,
but my brain is hard to shut off.
I want to shut it off.
Please shut it off.
Please
help me
stop it
please.

Overthinking

I wasn't prepared for the anxiousness
that has settled into the marrow of my being,
eroding my very structure with a gentle harshness
that creeps in slowly.

My brain is a hamster wheel
spinning, or a washing machine
on high, especially when my head
hits the pillow.

But it has a soft underbelly, fur in my palm.
I think I can begin
To slow it, a sudden projectile
vomit leaving my brain.

The page is my two am toilet bowl.
I run to in sudden need
and then, at last
the anxiety is able to rest.

is it not enough to just love?

perhaps love is having the tender flesh of a neck inches away from your incisors and deciding not to sink your teeth in and tear. maybe it's someone's hand reaching under the table and pressing their palm to your quivering knee, a flick of anxious eyes meeting a squinted smile and tension flooding out from the soles of your feet, leg still. you can find it in the moment that your joke lands, the pause as you wait for their lips to purse in a barely contained smile and the fond roll of eyes. you look for it in the divots of their fingers. it's in the reflection of a rearview mirror as you drive north. caught between the curvature of where shoulders meet spine. whispered when you roll over in bed. pot meeting kettle on the kitchen floor. bending and breaking and rebuilding. a witness to each show. growing weeds tangled. judge and jury. tag out. tag in. learn. know. ask. you. us. i.

our shoulders pressed together: shouldn't this be enough?

the other side of the rainbow

i've waited for the rainbow
waited for the cycle to complete its
colors and make me whole again
as time passed by
i became its undertones
dark blue hues with a faint gold
statue of liberty with---no stature
my rainbow was never enough

Stomping Out the Ashes

A bear in a ranger hat taught me that
even little flames can lead to big fires.
It's a terrible thing, really, that
something so small can
consume you.

But I don't worry about fires anymore.
I stay away from flint and steel
and avoid fields of dry grass.
No fire of mine will start
if I can help it.

But it is not my place to put out other flames.
I let them eat and rage because
who am I to extinguish that if
I refuse to even let
myself burn?

I stomp my own ashes out before others
can get to my smoldering-self first.
I refuse to let them be the ones
to take my right
to burn.

The Marked

INT - MORGUE - NIGHT

[The room is mostly dark, save the desk light as MORGAN looks over files on a metal desk. She can be seen in a blood red cloak that conceals most of her hair and black combat gear. MORGAN looks sharp and focused as she reads, until her head whips up at the sound of footsteps, she freezes for a moment before swiftly tucking the files into her cloak.]

MORGAN

(whispered)

You've got to be kidding me.

[She quickly morphs into a security guard, careful to remember the uniform of the ones she saw outside earlier that day with KENDALL. She now appears to be a more muscular woman with blonde hair in a dark blue security jacket and holds a dim flashlight. The shot pans just as MORGAN goes to the doorway a MAN passes by and pauses at the sight of her when he turns an emblem on his sleeve becomes apparent, an ouroboros. The camera zooms in on the detail before getting a close up shot of

THE MAN's face as he speaks.]

THE MAN

Turn around and don't make a sound.

MORGAN

Yes, master.

THE MAN

Such pitiful servants the normal class are.

[MORGAN pretends to be under his mind control as THE MAN taunts her, giving him a dirty look as he looks down before putting up a poker face as he stares into the false blue of her eyes.]

The Marked

THE MAN

You're a beautiful thing, aren't you? Kiss me.

[MORGAN feels the rage building in her stomach as she goes to obey the command. However, as she draws him closer as if to kiss his neck, she instead bites off his ear, applying just enough pressure to get the job done. THE MAN clutches his ear as his hand coats with blood, and he falls to the ground. MORGAN stands above him.]

MORGAN

Predatory thing, aren't you?

THE MAN

You bit—

MORGAN

I'd choose your next words carefully.

[MORGAN gets rid of the glamor she placed and shows her true figure and swiftly unsheathes the dagger from her belt.]

MORGAN

What is your current assignment? I know you're running new tests on these bodies.

THE MAN

That's classified, and if you think I'm going to tell a **γυναίκα**, much less a shapeshifter, you're delusional. I thought your kind was dead and buried.

MORGAN

Most are, but clearly you couldn't catch us all.

The Marked

MORGAN (CONT.)

Now I suggest you start talking if you hope to survive tonight. Or should I make the other ear match?

[MORGAN brings the dagger to THE MAN's left ear without hesitation. The man's eyes go frantic as his body stiffens.]

THE MAN

No, no, please. I'll talk, I'll tell you what you want.

[Sweat can be seen dripping down THE MAN's temple and his hands shake. MORGAN crouches down to his eye level.]

MORGAN

Name, Status, Assignment.

THE MAN

Harrison Smith, Rank 3, Data Collection.

MORGAN

You're new. Cocky for a 3. What is the data showing?

HARRISON

The new software is affecting people more effectively.

MORGAN

Effectively how?

[A loud beep sounds from HARRISON's pocket.]

HARRISON

Go to Hell.

MORGAN

Oh, Harrison, I really wish you hadn't done that.

[An alarm sounds across the morgue as MORGAN slits his throat. She knows morphing into HARRISON will raise too much suspicion. Her best bet is to fight her way out. After knocking out seven guards, MORGAN flees to the exit.]

The Marked

EXT - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

[MORGAN pounds on the van window. KENDALL unlocks the car, and MORGAN rushes in.]

KENDALL

Are you okay?

MORGAN

Yes, I promise. Drive, we need to go. Now.

[KENDALL puts the car into drive and speeds off, focused on not being followed until the pair reach the highway. The camera records between the two in the car from behind them, capturing the luxury leather material and the bright red of KENDALL's hair, stark in comparison to MORGAN's.]

KENDALL

What did you find?

MORGAN

Not enough.

[MORGAN sighs as she pulls out the documents stolen off the desk. She looks over the rest of the pages as she speaks.]

MORGAN

The collective is working on making their chips better. Which ones I can't be sure, but apparently they're finding successful developments.

KENDALL

Of course they are, they would be nothing without their little mind control tricks.

MORGAN

A class 3 was given clearance to use it.

KENDALL

Shit, when I was a chief, you had to be at least class 7.

The Marked

[KENDALL chews on her nails nervously of the hand that was on the shift. She rarely ever speaks of her time in the collective; MORGAN holds her hand and stops her from chewing further.]

MORGAN

What class is required to be a chief?

[MORGAN asks softly in almost a whisper as the camera gets a close up of KENDALL's face.]

KENDALL

The highest rank below the **οι άνδρες** and past initiation. Most women can never join the collective, but if the blood law is active, there is an exception. My grandfather was a founder.

[KENDALL falls silent; MORGAN squeezes her hand. After looking over the files for another couple of minutes, MORGAN finally comes to the last page in the stack. The camera focuses on a picture that is paper clipped to the file. A woman can be seen strapped to a hospital bed clearly under the influence of some type of drugs that was administered during the administration phases. MORGAN begins to read out loud from the file.]

MORGAN

Patient appears to be more willing to cooperate as the testing continues. Day 5 going smoother, the patient has agreed to eat the food which was previously resisted in our other trials. This has to be early testing; they've already mastered things like this.

The Marked

KENDALL

That can't be right, keep reading.

MORGAN

Day 27, the new drug is proving to work. We have activated Operation Cobra and the siren song is working effectively; the patient was able to make a guard bite off his tongue. Further testing should prove the limits of this ability. We are hopeful for total control.

[MORGAN slams the file shut, her face pale.]

KENDALL

They can't do this, their numbers, they would be unstoppable.

MORGAN

If they're still in the testing phases, there's time. People have to be dying from this or they wouldn't be operating in a morgue. This is being kept quiet for now, I'm sure of it.

KENDALL

What do we do for now?

MORGAN

For now, we rest, I'm exhausted.

KENDALL

And then what?

MORGAN

And then we burn them to the ground.

Polyglot's Lament

I list three languages as fluent on my resume
And in some dozen others I can at least say good day
I've practiced signing presentations since about year one
I joined a historical translation team once for fun

I can navigate most modern forms of communication
Which have at least a Latin or West Germanic foundation
For Gaelic roots, I've Dia dhuit, for Sinic, Ni Hao Ma
For Slavic roots I've Dobriy Vecher, Swahili: siku njema

I feel I've twisted tongues and ears far as they go
I've studied tips and tricks to understand but even so
Some higher form of dialogue nevertheless eludes
Despite diligent study I still can't translate your moods

I turned next to cryptography to decode your mixed signals
Statistical analysis confirms it's nothing simple
I think that at some point you may have used a one-time pad
To obscure that which makes you happy and what makes you sad

I ran your texts by an old friend who works for NSA
He got back to me one week later and said there's no way
To extract actionable intel from the words you've written
And yet I feel compelled to persist almost as though smitten

What secrets lie behind that smile ever enigmatic
A challenge which enraptures my mind with feelings dramatic
Yet while I've many tools to bring to bear I start to fear
That all my intellect may simply turn out worthless here

My Father, Variegated

There is not a day where you do not haunt me, for within
your eye there is no separation.

You stand with guileless wit at the edges of beds,
and the centers of doorways are dampened by your presence.

In the bottoms of small coffee cups and in the drowsiness
of evergreen trees, I find your words to me, and I falter.

You amble alongside paths laden with moss, in bodies of young men
and strangers who carry your beautiful sameness.

In the stained glass of front windows and in the fineness
of early morning air, I find your love for me, and I break.

There is not a day where you are not my father, for within
your eternity there is no abstraction.

Congratulations

It is my great pleasure
To name you this year's winners
Of the perpetual contest
For most functional family
By default

A Memoir to Never be Read Aloud

My parents know I'm queer, although I've never mentioned it to them, and I'm not sure I ever will. As Benjamin Franklin put so simply, there are some things better left unsaid. Walking around an object that has taken up space for years becomes second nature. At times, one can forget that the object exists. I've hesitated to look at the object of my queerness or face it with my entire being. Looking at the object would remind me that it exists, and existing is not possible without questioning. In not admitting to my queerness, I assure myself that this will slow the process down. I make promises to myself that eventually I will grow immune to the minuscule jabs. Eventually. Recently, the object in my household has become overbearing, finally running out of space to take up after the constant cycling of blending with its surroundings and shoving itself in my fucking face. I still attempt to squeeze my body through when it obstructs my path, closing my eyes as if it could get angry at me for gazing at it. At the end of the day, it's just an object. It has no meaning. It cannot think or verbalize its thoughts that it doesn't have. But the object is mine, and no one else's. And eventually, I must deal with it.

I am part of the first generation of my family born in the United States. The first generation to have money without working 4 jobs, the first to not speak my mother's language, or my father's. My parents immigrated to America when they were each younger than the age of 10. My father, born in Vietnam went to the Bronx and my mother, who was born in Laos, to Iowa. Eventually, my father would move to Danbury, and after that, to Iowa where he would meet my mother during their undergrad years. My mother went to a Christian school system for most of her life, while my father went through public school. I frequently contemplate their upbringings, and I wonder if they spent their adolescence denying their Asian identity. I see it in my mother's love for blonde highlights in her hair, and my father's ignorance. I wonder if perhaps they could understand, on any level, why I choose to deny my own identity around my family.

The culture that is most prevalent in my life is that of the Vietnamese. My parents moved to Danbury simply because that is where my only living grandparents are. The one criterion for my parents was that their children must have grandparents. We moved right up the street from them in 2002. Family and honor are essential to a good, old-fashioned Vietnamese life. Honor is a tricky concept. Family members are shunned for setting up GoFundMe's, even when everyone knows they really need it. Elders in my family are to be respected regardless of how awful their viewpoints may be, and I find myself falling into this trap. It is as if my lineage holds power over me, directing me to it and tying it all together. I cannot, unfortunately or maybe fortunately, bring myself to hate any members of my family. It isn't said aloud too often anymore, but they would like me to marry an Asian man. Bonus points if he's Vietnamese, of course. Growing up I was tasked to set the table, clean the dishes, help in the kitchen, stand up straight; encouraged to make myself look pretty and sound pretty and think pretty. Over the years I became aware that I was being trained to be a good housewife, or specifically, a good Asian housewife. I would take care of my husband, pick out his clothing and wash it when it gets dirty. I would cook and clean and I would have to grow out of swearing and yelling.

Even writing this now, I question if my queerness could be an act of rebellion. A slap in the face that never makes its way past my shoulders. A sort of, "ha, jokes on you, I might not even marry a man." Not wanting to fully dig deep into it, I use 'queer' as a blanket term for my sexuality. Calling myself pansexual leads to too many questions from too many people, and bisexual doesn't sound quite right either. I'll date, quite literally, anyone who sparks my interest, and I am quite content with that thought. I see no need for labelling a fluid concept. And perhaps, or most definitely, this mindset comes from those in my family who have labelled themselves and come out as queer. There is a confidence required to come out to your family that I clearly utterly lack. Snide comments are tossed around like recipes. My mother asks me once, twice, five times every other year if I am gay. Always the same tone of voice, as if she is terrified of hearing the answer. I know she is terrified of my answer. So, I lie, and I have gotten very good at lying.

My go-to responses became; “No, why would you think that? -or “No, I’m not gay, I like boys,” (half lying). Sometimes I pray to a God I’m not sure exists that my soulmate is a man so that I can avoid the object of my sexuality in relation to my family until I die of old age. Or, like many others, I can live with a “roommate” forever, or until we grow sick of each other.

About a month ago I overheard my mother in a conversation with my grandma about my mother’s nephew, my first cousin, who had just gotten married to his husband. I can’t recall the entire conversation, or maybe I just blocked it out, but the most memorable part of it was my mother’s use of the phrase, “I just don’t get it,” -referring to my cousin being gay. Part of me believes I can explain it to her, but that part of me cowers deep in my head and I am incapable of finding it. On another occasion my mother asked me if I knew my other cousin was a lesbian, as she had told her mother this. “She has a boyfriend right now, so I think she’s bisexual. I don’t think I could ever be with a bisexual person; they would always want more, you know?” I want to tell her it’s not my duty to explain other people’s gayness to you. I want to tell her that none of it really matters, and to mind her own business. I never do. I often find myself being one tongue hold from blurting aloud, “I’m queer. I like men and women and people in between and I smoke a lot of weed and I also don’t like your stew.” But I never do.

This thing, this object that suffocates me and presses on my chest and takes up space is mine and mine only. It is not mine to share or giveaway. I likely will unsuccessfully chip away at the object or cover it with a blanket or perhaps get someone to help me move it to another space. Regardless, it will always remain. Some things are better left unspoken and unspecified. I don’t want to be reduced to being the gay cousin, the gay daughter, or the gay granddaughter. I’ve accepted the possibility of never coming out to my family. It is a strange feeling, attempting to accept your family for who they are when really, they would never truly accept you for who you are. It is true that someday I may grow not to care about being the gay cousin, that I will not care to be understood completely by my family.

But I have a foreboding, gut wrenching and inevitable feeling that I will always care. One day, when the object in my household grows to touch the walls, surely it will kill me and spread my insides across the walls, finally revealing my identity to myself and my family.

braised rabbit and fine wine

“I was never afraid before you showed up.”

– Nick Offerman as Bill in *The Last of Us*, Episode 3

as i carry you up the stairs one last time,
we are champions emerging victorious from battle –

i refuse to leave the life we've built for ourselves.
it is so miraculous, so precious;
how could you expect me to go quietly?

– but i lay you in our bed for the last time
and we sleep under blankets of breezes.
our love will remain long after this house,
or even the earth itself. finally, we are finally free

a vintage hug

the sky turned yellow,
camouflaging the sun,
the day you pulverized our grapes.

the birds were mellow
at a quarter to one;
at night, they twisted into feathered shapes.

in the moonlight, your feet
split rotund flesh while
i curl into myself in bed.

the final squelch sends me upright,
and i abandon the sheets,
my robe flurrying behind me as i run.

you are covered in purple
in the wooden mashing basin,
and i am veiled by sea foam green.

the battered harvest sprays the lawn as
i leap into the tub, and we somehow
find enough space to curl into each other.

verse xxii - a worldly attraction

when I find that the mountains have become
just as soft as the bed for us to rest the night upon;

and when I discover that your eyes match the stars
that fall from their fixed points in the sky,

then will I say:

"Oh my Dunya, how your beauty has condemned me!"

and when I see the oceans and rivers run
the same red as your lips;

and when I realize that the winter sun heats my skin
hotter than your embrace,

then will I say:

"Oh Dunya, how I regret choosing you!"

It Would Still Be You

Do you believe in reincarnation?
I do, I think. I'd like another chance to
have that breathtaking realization that I
am glad of your earthly existence.

A promise that one day we will go dance
between the layers of this mortal plain;
stardust intertwining, a cosmic trance
connected through a fate-determined chain.

And when it comes time to depart, the pain
of leaving you shall ease with haste as
I remember that the string between remains:
a bond that even death cannot untie.

That in another life, it would be you
that I will undoubtedly come back to.

your favorite girl

Let me drift away in the autumn haze
Let me show you how easy it is to disappear
How easy it is to not be seen
I'll be the leaves on the sidewalk your feet crunch

I'll die with a stomp
And float away with the wind
I'll be left in nowhere land to be forgotten
An old cemetery where no one comes to visit
The dark shade of green I once was turns to red
and fades into brown
My ends will curl up into a small ball and sink into the ground
I'm yours to tear apart

I'll drift away into the autumn haze
I'll sink into the ground and rot
And you can step on me

spring foliage

the first leaf turns red in april,
and the flowers take forever to bloom.
we walk through forests of trees turning
orange in august, and susans refuse
to reveal their visage underneath
furled curtains.

our cups clink in the garden as
a brown petal falls off the oak
above us. caterpillars inch up branches
and as their chrysalises form, they pray
they won't be the next bug
to succumb to the thundering footsteps
of a squirrel.

Window Shopping

It's this window that makes the grass breathe
Fueling my dreams of the future
My dreams of what I can be.
I try to open it, my fingers gripping the molding
Until I'm numb inside
I can't get through to the other side,
Please I want to get through,
Let me get through.
It's this window that shows me
What I could have been
The curtains are drawn as I'm blind to the fact
That there's more
I'd leave my room with my knuckles bleeding
Windows cracked with dry blood,
My blood
It's my car window that makes these dreams
Seem true there just out of reach
I'll drive a little faster to see if I can catch them.

Making Small Talk

You asked me “how I’m going” but are you serious?
 Are you just being polite or truly curious?
 Be careful asking, you might not like what you find
 If you should still insist I’ll share now my state of mind

All colors now fade to shades of black and gray
 As memory of happiness now seeps away
 Flushed out by unrelenting rage turning to hate
 And I would wish that everyone share in my fate

For it is written misery loves company
 Thus I shall ensure none is happier than me
 And as it happens I am feeling rather down
 So I will take it out on everyone around

While I am in this mood no one shall suffer joy
 Let every city suffer the fate of Troy
 Hail to calamity and let the heavens fall
 Snuff out the last light and let darkness cover all

Cast down the gods in their temples high and mighty
 Cull all the birds that would chirp their songs so lightly
 Tear down the tapestries and throw them on the pyre
 Let the great library now feel the cleansing fire

On my authority the sun shall no more shine
 Nor shall any man have merriment and wine
 No stars or moon shall, til further notice, rise
 Any who would defy the order dies

Sow salt into the fields so nothing more may grow
 Chastise the populace until they are laid low
 Scourge what remains on earth and then darken the sky
 Gaudium delenda est shall be the battle cry

That’s how I feel today and I’m so glad you asked
 Now as we must return to face our daily tasks
 Though I shall inwardly continue facing hell
 If anyone else asks, I’ll say I’m doing well

Looking from the Outside

I am on the outside of the world.
Looking into the world like a glass.
Never being invited into the inside,
Never being brave enough to shatter the bubble,
Transparent to the world.
“I am here,” I say.
But no one is there to listen.
Pleading ignorance to the outside,
My cries go unheard.
The world turns with me looking in.
I walked by on the edge of the circle,
Looking on from the outside.

Sea Urchin

A young boy pulls himself out of the brine, fingernails digging into the rotting wood of the pier, and his small face peeks up from the boards. The rest of him dangles, swaying in the current of the receding tide, and he blinks into the blindingly orange sunset light that slips between city buildings to land right between his eyes. He rests his elbows on the damp wood and lets the water flow from his hair and run in tiny rivers down his arms, down through the rot-cracks and down back to the ocean where it belongs, content to listen to the dripping and the waves and watch the sunset, half-submerged and shivering in the cool twilight air.

It's not until the sun has inched below the horizon completely, the sea reflecting the silver and blue lights of the city, that the boy moves at all. The stars and moon reflect in big green eyes and flash off the scales off a glittering tail as he slips beneath the surface, back where he belongs until another sunset tempts him to the pier.

Call of the Sea

I know those words you softly speak to me
create a siren's call to help me drown—
a weight tied to my legs to drag me down,
a spiteful lie to pull me to the sea.

But good things always come in groups of three
and on your face I see three eyes, so brown
like aging rust that eats away at crowns,
like sunken ships made from mahogany.

I want to sink into your cold embrace,
pretend for just a moment you are warm.
Ignore the algae growing off your face.
Ignore the way the sharks smell blood and swarm.
For years I've sailed, but now I stop the chase:
another lonely sailor lost to storms.

Dreams of Swan Lake

When twilight strikes and our eyes fall into slumber, a place greets us in a world of imagination.

A starry sky, mirrored by the water below it, even further below a grand oak.

Two figures greet us every time.

They felt like swans, a white swan and a black swan.

They danced below the starry sky like graceful ballerinas, Dancing en pointe on the water itself.

They twirled and jumped, flying like the swans they were meant to be.

The two danced and danced, growing farther apart across the starry lake

Until they stopped and twirled once more.

Soon, they rushed towards one another and grabbed ahold.

In a pas de deux, they danced as one as they glowed under the starry sky.

They danced as one until the stars disappeared, one by one.

One final farewell, as one swan held the other above.

As the sun rose, a new tale began.

The swans began to fly as they grew wings and bowed in the sky.

As dawn breaks, we awake.

Until twilight breaks again, so we may have more dreams of Swan Lake.

Sandcastles

When I was young I'd build grand sandcastles along the beach
 With levees and embankments so the tide would never reach
 From Army Corps of Engineers I'd take my inspiration
 As building to withstand the test of time became fixation

I took up writing with the sense I wanted to be heard
 The idea that if I dropped dead my words would be preserved
 In reading generations would still get a sense of me
 Offering albeit primitive an immortality

I read a poem one, I think Shakespeare's sonnet eighteen
 The words meant to preserve this fair youth for eternity
 And yet to readers their identity remains a mystery
 The words endured and yet the subject has been lost to history

How mighty Ozymandias has crumbled into dust
 If that befell the king of kings what hope is there for us
 If I were Bard of Avon perhaps I'd not be forgot
 Yet while maybe a writer, William Shakespeare I am not

For even if I stemmed the tide soon in the cyclones came
 Erasing that small mound of sand on which I'd staked my fame
 Each time I'd imagine my sand fortress was built to last
 And every time the current swept ceaseless into the past

When spoken my verses are meant to carry in their rhyming
 As sound waves ricochet off aided by poetic timing
 And yet the further those waves carry into space
 The worse they get distorted into static in the bass

If printed these words' ink some day will fade to pulp and dust
 If saved online the servers turn eventually to rust
 Radio waves spread out through space until too faint to hear
 Hard drives in space get bombed by cosmic rays until wiped clear

This universe does not condone enduring legacy
The author who would make a mark is facing entropy
That quantum legal loophole that while nothing is destroyed
Inevitably all becomes but whispers in the void

Perhaps Planck, Gibbs, and Maxwell had it right after all
The writer's quest made futile by thermodynamic law
Perhaps it is a cosmic folly picking up the pen
For all that's spun from dust must once return to dust again

And yet the thought to cap the pen and turn in a blank page
Somehow seems worse dishonor than lashing out in rage
Those men were old, they could be wrong, our species is still young
We've much left to discover, we have so many songs unsung

We only know that we can't get to forever from now
But could Shakespeare imagine a website anyhow?
Perhaps these problems we can't solve our children one day will
And their collective sandcastles a city on a hill

Blue Avenues

“Hey, uh, ain’t you Joseph’s kid?”

“Uh yeah. I am. A, a pack of Marlboros please,” Stevie said as he showed his I.D. and pointed to the one he wanted.

“God bless his soul,” the clerk spoke sincerely as he grabbed the pack of cigarettes and dropped it on the counter. “That’ll be eleven dollars,” he paused as Stevie paid, “Hey uh, why are you even smoking that crap anyway? You should definitely be thinking about your lungs and your future. Wasn’t it cancer that did it to him?”

“It wasn’t cigarettes that did that to him, jack ass,” Stevie returned. He looked at the clerk’s half stunned face. Stevie shoved the pack of cigarettes into his pocket.

“Have a good one.”

“Yeah, you too, man,” Stevie said as he walked out the gas station, taking a left. It was almost tomorrow already, 11:50 something. He lit the first of the pack with his lighter, smoking it while he walked onward. He never smokes cigarettes. He was lucky though, to live within walking distance of a main street that stayed alive until around 3 am. So, Stevie wandered the one street, walking towards something, he didn’t know what. It was a Friday night and there were people still living their night out. The clubs and bars were full, and the street still inhabited people. Things were very much alive here with Stevie in the middle.

He took three puffs before tossing it on the floor in front of him, smothering it out with his foot. He hated the taste of cigarettes. Stevie kept the pack in his pocket until he could find somewhere to throw it out and walked on. After a while he found one, along with something else. He stood in front of the garbage can and took the pack out, dropping it into the hole. He then suddenly became aware of the music coming from the alley way. Stevie recognized the song and the old feelings it gave him. He hurriedly walked to the bouncer and showed his I.D. to him. As he entered the club, they were still playing the song, “Let’s Go to Bed” by The Cure. It was a goth club. Stevie walked to the bar and got a drink. He looked at the crowd dancing in the middle of the room and then to the outdoor section for smokers of any

Stevie went to the fence, where he stood quietly, taking a small sip every once in a while. After 5 minutes of this, someone walked up to him.

“You look like someone who’s got a lighter. Got one by any chance?” she said. Without talking or really getting a good look at her, he grabbed the lighter out of his pocket and held it out in her direction. “Thanks, man,” she said right before putting a joint in her mouth and lighting it. She took one deep puff and exhaled. Tired that he hasn’t truly looked at her yet, she said, “Hey Stevie, do you know...it’s me?” as she handed him the lighter. Stevie finally looked up at her as he took the lighter.

“Jamie?” he said flustered and startled. “I, I’m sorry I didn’t—”

“It’s okay, Stevie, I know how you are, always in your head. Always quiet,” she replied with warmth. “I wouldn’t think to ever see you in a club, I guess it makes sense for it to be this one,” she paused for bit, “that song they just played, by The Cure, reminded me of you actually.” He smiled and blushed a bit.

“Yeah, that’s uh, that’s what made me come in here actually,” he took a sip and swallowed, “Though really, I’m here because tonight is uh, another one of those nights. I’m sure you remember.”

“Really?” She gave him a serious look, “Oh god c’mon, you’re not still doing that. Wandering off in the night alone, sad as you always are. You know, one would think you’d grow up from doing that.”

“It’s not like it’s anything that bad, I’m not drinking my sorrows away or anything,” Stevie took another sip after saying that. Jamie looked at him and then to his cup, “This is my first drink, okay?” He laughed a bit. She didn’t.

“It’s been like 3 years, Stevie. I walked up to you hoping you had changed, hoping that you had grown up a bit. This is embarrassing.” She put her hand to her forehead. “I literally have my own light; I just didn’t know how to go up to you. I don’t know why, but seeing you here with some kind of society seemed like evidence enough that you’d changed from when we broke up.” He was quiet, having nothing to say, nothing to defend himself. “I still don’t know what you’re even looking for out there. Is it just boredom?”

"I," he paused, swallowed, and licked his lips, "I don't know anymore. I don't even know if there was a true reason the first time. But you know, he died."

"It's been six years, Stevie."

"And?"

"And everyone has been living without you. I know it still hurts. A lot, but I wanted to live life with you, even if it wasn't for that long. I guess maybe a part of me was still hoping for that tonight, but I don't think you even want that, to live on." Jamie was teary eyed by this point. "Life goes on. It sucks, I know."

She looked at him for a bit. Stevie was looking at the ground, with Jamie in his peripheral vision, tears at the bottom of his eyes. She reached for his face, gently making him look at her, which he willingly let. "Goodnight and goodbye, my Stevie." which was said with heavier tears. Jamie then walked out into the rest of the club.

He hung out there for a bit, recovering himself. He then chugged down the rest of his drink. He started towards the entrance and made it outside the club to the street. He then started down the same sidewalk, continuing his wandering path from earlier. Stevie walked for some time, passing fewer people as he went on. Then he stopped in front of a house. On this street, besides the clubs, bars, stores, and gas stations, were some houses. This house was one of the abandoned ones. It was the one that Stevie used to explore as a kid. He walked to the backyard, remembering the bolted front door. He went up the deck stairs and through the doorway that was missing its door. The inside was just as it was when he was a kid, but older.

It was dimly lit by the street, but enough for him to see and step over the discarded mannequin that lay in the hallway to what would've been the bedroom. Stevie didn't enter the room but stood there outside, staring into the darkness there.

"Restless night?" spoke from the darkness. Stevie wasn't shocked or scared. "I suppose something must be on your mind, care for a chat?"

"I guess it would be nice to just... talk to someone, about things or..." Stevie trailed off as he rubbed the back of his neck.

"I get it, I understand," the voice said warmly, "So then, tell

me son, tell me your problem.” Stevie looked down at the ground.

“Most times, it’s a, it’s overwhelming, being reminded that I have a future. I just don’t feel ready for the whole thing. Growing up, I mean older, would mean I’d have to leave some things behind. And I’m not prepared to do that,” Stevie looked up to the darkness and continued, “I think I’ve been stagnant. I know I ruined the relationship I had with Jamie. It had to have been because I was stagnant.” The voice seemed to think for a little.

“Sounds like you’ve stopped living,” the voice paused, taking in an audible breath, “Lemme guess, you were 16 when you stopped?” They waited for an answer. Stevie didn’t say anything right away.

“I stopped living?” Stevie asked concernedly.

“Yeah, you stopped living. You put your life on pause, you know what I mean. You decided that growing up was too hard. You know, you said it yourself, there are things you don’t want to leave behind. That’s why you’ve stopped living on, that’s why you still carry this sadness. You know what I mean?”

“No, I don’t know. I’m sorry, but I don’t know.” Stevie replied.

“That’s bullshit, Stevie, I know you know. I know how you feel about living on. I know how you feel about continuing your life. Without the comforts of childhood, without him. You know you know too.” There wasn’t an ounce of harsh tone in what the voice just said.

“I-” Stevie stopped. An arm reached out of the darkness. It placed its hand onto his shoulder. It was warm and familiar, from long ago.

“You have to let me go.”

“I can’t...I-I don’t want to.”

“You’re too sad like this. You need to.”

“I- I know,” Stevie sniffled, “I know I am. I know I am, every day and every one of these restless walks. But that’s what reminds me of you. That’s how I won’t forget you in the midst of me living on.” Tears started to form under his eyes.

“But you’re not even doing that, you’re not even living on.”

“You’re...right. I’m just wandering around with what’s left of being a kid, with what’s left of you. The memories, the feelings,” Stevie wiped his tears yet more followed, “16 years of you, that’s not enough. That’s all I have for the rest of my life. I guess I was just trying to delay the inevitable, that there would be a point sometime in the future where I’ll have more years of memories without you than with you. So, I hold onto the sadness because that’s what keeps reminding me of you.” Another arm reached out of the darkness and wiped Stevie’s tears. Then it wrapped itself around him, embracing him gently. It pulled away after a while and seemed to look at him dearly.

“Stop holding so tightly, son.” There was a swallow. “You’re not letting yourself fall to your future.” And Stevie sobbed, letting all six years out.

He walked out the front door of his apartment. It was the next day, about 9 in the morning and Stevie was headed out to a café on the same main street as everything else. He entered the building and ordered when it was his turn in line. He then stood to the side, waiting. It was here when a guy walked into the café. He was about the same age as Stevie. He looked at him and the guy looked back. The two blushed a bit, nervously looking away. No matter where Stevie looked, he could see him. Then Stevie’s order was called, he picked it up and sat down at a table. He could still see the guy from here. After some time, the guy’s order was called. He picked it up and walked towards Stevie.

“Hey, um. This might be weird, but could I get your phone number? That is if you’re into...” the guy trailed off a bit, clearly flustered and nervous. Stevie was surprised. “You know what, I’m sorry. Just, just pretend I didn’t say anything.” The guy turned to the exit.

“Wait,” Stevie smiled. The guy stopped. “You can have my phone number if you want.” The guy walked back to him. “Actually, would you want to drink your coffee here with me, and just talk? That is, if you’re not doing anything right now.” Stevie felt something in him as he said this.

“Yeah, sure. I’m not busy right now.” He took a seat at the table.

"I'm Stevie by the way."

"I'm Damon."

"Hi, Damon. I like the way you dress." The two talked for hours. They dove into who they were and what they liked. They talked about personal things; they talked about life. The connection was instant. Then there was a moment of quiet.

"Hey Stevie?" Damon broke the silence.

"Yeah."

"I know this may be too soon. But I think I feel like I could spend a bit of life with you. You know, like I could live some of my future with you." It was at this moment Stevie realized the voice from the abandoned house wasn't real. It wasn't even his dead father. It was exactly what he needed at that moment; it was exactly what he needed for the future.

"You know what, I think I feel the same way."

verse xxv - kun fayakun

it's not as easy as kun fayakun
i dare not to let it be that simple

there's something to be gained from shedding blood sweat tears
[pooling at my feet]

too good to be true
i'll hike this mountain alone
[watch my back grow small]

let me go ahead;

come along with me only when the sight of me
is in danger of disappearing.
i'll start waiting when your steps grow louder.

[i'm really waiting, you know.]

and now that we're here and the summit's nothing to sneeze at,
my feet keep moving on,
[i don't mean to leave you behind]
eager for the next mountain to climb,
but my eyes find no new horizon to lock on.

should I drop to my knees?
force myself to fall?
so not only can you catch up again,
but so my heart at the bottom of the mountain does too?

things are only ever clear at the top and the bottom;
only lies lie in the valleys.

"Be, and it is."
remind me how easy it is to make a mountain out of a molehill,

but it will always be hard for us to climb it.

don't yell at me too harshly
when if i obsess over the mounds.
just drag me back to the summit,
and push me to my knees,
and remind me to kiss my ego to the summit.

just
please leave your hand on the small of my back.

