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# BREAKWALL

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## ABOUT THE COVER

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# BUT YOU'RE NOT COMING BACK

---

ANGELAO

i miss it

your dark eyes, withholding the world's secrets  
the chime of the laughter, your biggest insecurity,  
though i cannot help but relish the most  
the downward sweep of your lashes at every compliment  
the asymmetrical dimples marking your chin  
and the stray freckles kissing the tips of your ears

sometimes i smell the ghosting fragrance of your skin  
melanin kissed by citrus soap and cheap perfume  
oh, how i remember being able to kiss your bare shoulders  
and the curve of your neck, and the point of your nose  
and your cherry blossom lips meeting mine

i miss the gentle touches of your fingertips on my cheek,  
and the comfort in your warmth

illusion fooled me into believing that i did not need you  
when i spent my nights with strangers  
but with the pale moon in my window  
and an empty silhouette besides me in bed  
i met the wave of melancholy that whispered to me my regret

i am rueful, my dear  
to have let you go so easily  
to have you slip through my clumsy fingers like worthless sand  
when you are stardust in disguise

i saw the shattered shards of faith in your eyes that evening  
when red and black bordered my vision  
and your velveteen voice hardened like jagged rocks on the starless  
night  
of a shipwreck  
but i never stopped to listen

i miss you

like an itching addict his cocaine  
like a derelict her home  
like an old sailor the sea  
and like lucifer did heaven  
but you're not coming back.

# DEER TO DIRT

---

COLLEEN EAST

My neighbor shot a deer, and sought to hang its antlers.  
The head sat in a wheelbarrow by the fence  
And stank in a way that made the dogs howl.  
In rot it sat for weeks  
Enthroned in darkened soil.  
It stared through the fence  
At a world that stood idle  
While dead like me crept by.  
Then, the skull was gone,  
Perhaps taken by heaven.  
Then the wheelbarrow,  
Perhaps taken for work  
In some fruitful garden.  
All that is left  
Is the dirt.

# NOCTURNE

---

COLLEEN EAST

I live in an egg.  
The screaming light of day pounds  
Heavily on the walls.  
There would be silence here otherwise—  
Fertile silence,  
Dark and trembling yolk  
Floating within the cool waters of solitude.  
With every tremor  
The water shivers,  
Heats to near boiling, bubbling  
Around the edges, for reality is  
Hot and vicious, running wild  
Like a feral dog outside the door,  
Hungry as only scavengers can be.  
No nobility to be found in that wide-open air.  
Exposure is where the rules of the game are found,  
Where the predators find prey

And the sun roasts with a grinning maw.

I am a sphere,  
A terrarium of unspoken dreams  
Contained in clinical incubation.  
I still honor that survival instinct honed by  
Our furthest dark-eyed ancestors  
Who deceived the diurnal dinosaurs with the magic of the moon.  
There is mammalian comfort in darkness,  
In craving shadows. By seeking where we are numb,  
We keep a part of ourselves untouched,  
Whole and simple,  
Nary a scratch on our fragility.

I live in a dark, glass house.  
Silence is how I survive.  
So often the waters shake.  
Hold me, I say. Cup me close and still.  
For when the glistening snout of reality comes sniffing—  
Fur and dust framed by the sun while the shadows of its teeth curl  
raw—  
Only then, under that pressure, will I break.

# TO MY POTENTIAL SELF

---

COLLEEN EAST

You are a knot lodged inside me—  
A pebble, a seed, a speckled bean.  
While I lay in the night, you stir  
Like most gestating things.  
I wake to your kicks  
And dig for you like a yard-mad dog,  
Sniffing and restless knowing you're there.

O magic bean  
Will you grow in the moonlight?  
Will you fasten your terrible vine to my spine  
And crawl up my throat?  
Perhaps you will flower.  
Perhaps you will burst with fruit.  
Perhaps you will crack open my skull

Like a magic pumpkin  
As you climb to reach those mighty clouds.

I strove to disavow you, once.  
I tried to quell your gasps for the sun  
With cold denial and a numb shot of bourbon.  
But now I water you,  
Curious and warm.  
Here, in my loamy covers  
Where darkness incubates all hereafters,  
I see your leaves in full flourish.  
I see you face the world with your adventurous yens,  
falling in love  
With that vast expanse bubbling in the sun.  
Perhaps you deserve it more than I do.

When they find me in the morning  
This bed will be yours,  
The sheets filled with soil.  
They will crane their necks to see, through the hole in the  
ceiling,  
You, the cartwheeling bean plant in the sky.  
They won't look at their feet  
To see from where your roots spread  
But will stand without mourning,  
Utterly in awe,  
At the linen-lined grave for who I used to be.

# TRAPPED INSIDE

---

DINA DAKDOUK

They say you loved  
Me. No doubt  
Shadowed their voice.

You left  
Too early. Leaving  
A body behind.

The memories  
Are slipping.  
There was no time.

My hand, you grasped.  
With all  
Your strength.

Never did I think

It was time  
For my goodbye.

It had occurred then.  
You were here  
But already gone.

# FOREVER BURNED

---

DINA DAKDOUK

A knife, gutted in my chest, deadening all feeling.  
Then, twisted again and again, and now, I am suffering.  
Drowning in my own blacked blood. I cannot lose you.

I am underwater—muffled noises of laughter and chatter  
Peek through. Surrounded only by the pounding of my  
heart  
Like the crashing of waves just before high tide.

Salt. I am drowning in salt water. Breathe deeply they say.  
I cannot. I swallow a draft of air, but it pierces my throat  
With a sharp coldness and burning of the sea.

Fighting to stay above, I breathe. In and out  
Like a dying fire, gasping for oxygen.  
Disengaged, I wander, pushing through all figures in my  
path.

There, a pair of wide golden-brown eyes smile at me.  
As though I lay under the fiery golden sun, a blanket of  
warmth envelops me;  
But today, I was burned.

# WHAT THEY SAY

---

KELLI FERRANTE

You've got to use those bigger words  
Is what the people tell me  
Because bigger words take you to better places  
And those places are better than yourself  
Better than your mind  
With more money and more ties  
And you could be there too  
Someday.  
If you used the word whimsical  
Instead of wild  
Flustered instead of angry  
Disillusioned instead of lost.  
At least, that's what people tell me  
At least, that's what people say

# WITHIN

---

KELLI FERRANTE

Today I sat still  
Which, before, I had never done -  
And for good reason, too,  
Because, though my body stayed heavy,  
My blood shook still,  
And while he droned I quivered more.  
What else could I ever ask for  
But to move my toes,  
To bang my head and watch it grow  
Red like rain,  
Red likes sores,  
And once released,  
Thank you, rain; You may pour.

# HOSPITAL BAND

---

MATTHEW CONN

I often go back to the days  
when the spring skies were filled with pouring rain.  
We would make blanket forts and spend the day  
watching old films of villains being slain.  
On cold nights I'd always ask you to stay.

I often go back to the days  
of fairgrounds and lemonade. Sitting in  
the summer grass talking while the bands played.  
I drank from the stream then, dreamed of spiced gin,  
white cakes, wedding bands, and feasts homemade.

I often go back to the days  
before these gold flowered dreams were masquerades.  
When it didn't hurt you to laugh and look  
back on the days of fairgrounds and lemonade.  
With all these memories I could fill a book.

I often try not to go back to the days  
of dark stained skies and the feelings of bittersweet pain.  
All I have now is the hospital band to remember your  
name.

# THE TREES GROW TALLER HERE

---

MATTHEW CONN

Leaving friends behind, we moved from the city  
and found a new house in mountainous Maine.  
To ask Mom about the move would be a pity,  
I knew it was the cough that gave Dad pain.  
Things are oddly different here in this town.  
There are no more candy-colored lights that shine  
but only the stars that seem to float down.  
We traded tall plain buildings for white pines,  
the smell of them cuts deeper than any knife.  
The town's small shops are cracked, bruised and misused.  
Some people here are stranger than wildlife.  
A month later I asked Dad why we moved,  
as we watched the sunset from the pier.  
Smiling, he replied, "the trees grow taller here."

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# MENTAL FLOWS

---

WAYNE NAGY

You start me up.

You bring me down.

The more I consume you, the more I drown.

Not in emotions, but in an ocean of electric pulses, taking  
control of my  
brainwaves, stimulating me in all the right ways.

But then you drain what beauty I had.

My thoughts.

My energy.

My life.

# DAUGHTERS OF MINE

---

NICKEA TAYLOR

When I first saw your beautiful face I believed I saw an  
angel for the first time.  
So tiny, so sweet, yet strong, and resilient.  
I never thought such a little jewel could shine so bright  
The illumination of your beauty stunned me.  
Grew so strong, so fast. Why couldn't you take a little time?  
Why did you move so fast? Leaving into a world that has no  
innocence. Scared and frightened I will be. You are my  
love, my light, my reason to move on never giving up  
because my will is strong. You're a part of me like I am a  
part of you. Never stiff always swaying never to hurt you.  
I am your protector strong as a tree bending not breaking  
strong and sturdy as can be. I'm a mother bear protecting  
and defending her young. You are my Jewels and I'm  
ecstatic I have more than one.

# ADVO-CAKE

---

DAJA CLARK

I love you but I love Jesus more.  
I may love you and me but then  
it's nothing more than a bore  
He's an advocate of more.  
My father cherishes when I sing.  
A pure preference forward  
with a gleam.  
My favorite savior  
saving me  
Naive  
I want truth my only greed.  
Willed watchers glued as  
I am windows candor.  
I'm like candy in Dandy-land  
You're welcomed to the Effervescent Manor.

# JOHN...

---

TERRI PATTON

It's too quiet in here right now  
and right now, the silence is too new  
Sleep is so allusive, here and there, everywhere  
time goes on and on like a clock  
with only one hand  
All patience escapes me right now  
all this loss on my chest and the pain  
on my brain, in my heart,  
at first seems endless  
Yet, this new reality is beginning to settle in  
as I look to God to explain everything and explanations  
a blur because it's too quiet in here right now  
Longing for the day, when really believing and knowing  
are the same and I say yes to welcoming  
dreams in again past and present  
Yes, to the thoughts of you floating in, calming my mind,  
my heart

as I take solace in the quiet enhancing the sacred moments  
of remembering you, of us, our world, our life together  
with less tears  
My heart's memories start bringing a smile,  
a song,  
a dance,  
a laugh out loud  
as you look in the mirror seeing something beautiful...you  
Embracing every new day, with it comfort, joy, and peace  
knowing that nothing can ever end the unbreakable bond  
and the love shared by the two of us, that reaches beyond  
time and space  
when nothing keeps peace from finding you  
wherever you are because  
his love is there with you always

# WE CAN

---

TERRI PATTON

Our world is a ghetto of unknowns  
where labels and tags swirl in and around deadly viruses  
unmerciful mixtures of questions,  
predictions, mis-information,  
rebellion, misfortune, and  
more unanswered questions  
of all that can be, will be, would be,  
should be, is be—in, are you in?  
Much too much, for everyone's brain  
hard not to be in mental overload - mode  
information grows to enormous, to ginormous, to  
massive, immense, creating a gargantuan monster—like  
thing  
Our human minds suffer daily and nightly to comprehend  
while continuously watching, listening, texting, talking,  
dreaming  
of what is or isn't, fearing what's to come or may not come,

or begin

Stop, stop, stop and stop some more

control what you truly know

know you, know yourself, know your portion

we can release, reclaim and restore

# AFRO CROWN

---

KRISTEN JONES

Does my pigmentation lead to the elimination of your confidence? Does not knowing why my skin is glowing leave you to feel incompetent? When I wear my crown so loud, so proud does that remind you of some evidence, that all my ancestors with skin of melanin from their tiptoes to the brim are heaven sent? Hair of sheep's wool and feet of bronze from a king who did not need a house of Gold rose to lead his people to the promised land, ended with nails in his hand and 500 years of toiling the dirt all worth another rich man's dollar. Speak up they say, speaker louder, they pray, let my People go! But where have we gone? Built this land, watch it go under, sell his mother then kill his brother and why does it not be put to rest? Because the Afro under my crown does not get respect. Black lives matter, but do they really, when a man can see me in the street and kill me? All lives matter, but is this honest, when a murderer is on trial and gets off with no contest Everyone is not filled with evil, but the evil is too great, if the world will not change then the world will break.

# MINDLESS CHAINS

---

KRISTEN JONES

So last night  
I had a dream.  
It felt more like a nightmare.  
I seen brown faces in the wrong places mentality and  
freedom was scarce.  
In this dream there were chains on their minds.  
As they dripped to a new whip the color of blood on the  
bottom of their  
soles was left behind.  
As they drove towards a destination unknown, they hate to  
contemplate  
their children's fate growing up in a broken home.  
Fendi was more important than furniture, Moncler  
supplements a mother  
that's not there, Gucci makes bystanders say "who's she"?  
This brings up the confidence she is lacking, due to the

longing of a father

sent packing.

As a culture, do we not know our worth? Poverty over sees priorities that  
stump our growth.

Last night I had a dream,

no, it was a nightmare, our brains were still in chains and our own people  
...did not care.





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POETRY  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
PROSE

**ELAINE BRUNSCHWIG**

Parting Ways



**ELAINE BRUNSCHWIG**

Bubblefest



**ELAINE BRUNSCHWIG**

Tracks



**COLLEEN FEE**  
Barred and Beautiful



**COLLEEN FEE**

Flighing High



**COLLEEN FEE**

Bad Day



**DONALD HEALY**

Untitled



**DONALD HEALY**

Untitled



**NYALA BURNETT**

Untitled



**NYALA BURNETT**

Untitled (cover)





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**03**

POETRY  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
**PROSE**



# TRIBAL DISSONANCE

---

MARK RODRIGUEZ

When most people meet me for the first time, they assume I speak Spanish. Normally that would be a safe assumption given that I am a brown man with the last name of Rodriguez. The truth is that I can barely string three words of Spanish together in any coherent way. Most of my family is fluent in Spanish, but it was never spoken to me growing up. I did not have what would be considered a traditional Hispanic upbringing. My family and I really have very little connection to Mexican culture, which was intentional on the part of my family. As an adult, my appearance is best described as “generic brown man,” and rarely does anyone think I am Mexican. Because of my inability to speak a second language, my upbringing, and my indistinct physical features, for most of my life I felt I did not belong to an ethnic or cultural tribe.

I spent a lot of my youth with my grandparents who could speak English and Spanish fluently, often going from one language to the other mid sentence without missing a beat. My grandmother refused to speak Spanish to me and never

encouraged me to learn it. She was adamant that I only speak English. I got the sense that my grandmother encountered a lot of bigotry for her Mexican heritage even in San Antonio, TX, a city with a large Hispanic population. I was raised to believe that acting or sounding Mexican was a bad thing. Having an accent meant you were looked down upon, that you were a lesser person. Consequently, I do not speak with any accent (not even a Texas accent). If the clothes I wore did not meet my grandmother's standards, she would tell me to change into something nicer, so I wouldn't "look like a Mexican." I never really thought about any of this when I was a kid. I just considered myself Texan because I was from Texas. To 8-year-old me, it was just as simple as that. It got complicated as I got older.

Being unable to speak Spanish was never an issue until I got to high school. About half of my high school was Hispanic and almost all of them could speak Spanish to varying degrees. All their parents spoke Spanish. My friends never gave me a hard time for not speaking Spanish, but when I visited their homes their parents would always look at me with a mixture of pity and disdain. They thought I was "acting white" or they thought I looked down on them. The sad truth is, because of the way I was raised I probably did unconsciously look down on them. Unsurprisingly, I rarely got a second invite to their homes, making it clear I was not a part of the tribe. I took a year of Spanish in high school and somehow got an A, but I hated every minute of it. My teacher, Señora Treviño, really did not like the few students who were supposed to be able to speak Spanish but did not. She was condescending and not helpful to us "coconuts" (brown on the outside, white on the inside). I retained little from the class other than confirmation that I did not belong.

Things got worse for me as an adult. Spanish-speaking coworkers in California would deride me for not speaking Spanish, almost to the point of bullying. I did attempt to learn Spanish again in my 20s, but those same coworkers would ridicule and tease me when I spoke it. I was told I didn't sound right, laughed at for my lack of accent and poor pronunciation, and told I shouldn't even bother because I wasn't a "real" Mexican. Being defiant and stubborn in nature, I flat out refused to speak Spanish from that point on. If my attempts to speak Spanish are met with scorn, why should I bother? Clearly I did not belong and they did not want me to belong, so in my mind there was no need to communicate with them in their native tongue.

A long time ago, I heard about something called cross-race bias, which is “the tendency to more easily recognize faces of the race that one is most familiar with (which is most often one’s own race)” (Wikipedia). This doesn’t seem to apply to me as I am not recognized as Mexican by other Mexicans, and other ethnicities with similar skin tone as me often believe I have the same background as them. When I lived in California, I attended a Chinese Dragon Boat Festival. An older, very tanned Chinese woman walked up to me, asked if I was enjoying the festival, and then asked me what part of China my family is from (I learned that the peoples of Central Asia/western China can have skin coloring like mine). In both California and here in Cleveland, I have dined at ethnic restaurants which were staffed by people from the country of the cuisine. If I was in an Indian restaurant, I was asked if I was Indian. If the restaurant served falafel, I was asked what part of the Middle East I am from. Usually I politely explain that I am not; however, there have been a few times where I said yes, as a silly joke to myself, and found that I was rewarded with free appetizers. A rare benefit to being without a tribe, I guess. A former coworker of mine found out I was Mexican and was surprised by this, saying, “Really? I thought you were just a white dude with a great tan.”

Several years ago, I was back home visiting my family in San Antonio. One Sunday morning I was asked to go pick up some barbacoa (a delicious breakfast beef that is traditionally eaten on Sunday mornings). I drove to the hole-in-the-wall store that was the family favorite. I was fifth in line and noticed that the cashier was speaking rapid-fire Spanish to the customers ahead of me. I became concerned as I knew I did not have the language to place an order in Spanish. When it was my turn at the counter, I mentally prepared myself for a difficult broken Spanish/broken English/pantomime conversation to relay my order, but the cashier looked right at me and said in English, “Yes, sir. How may I help you?” Did I look nervous and she assumed I didn’t speak Spanish? Did I have the look of a “coconut”? Maybe it was the way I was dressed? Whatever the reason, she knew I did not belong to the Hispanic tribe, so much so that she just spoke English to me despite my appearance and presence in a very Mexican part of town. It seemed that every tribe but my own wanted to claim me as theirs.

As I have grown older, I have become more comfortable with who I am. More importantly, I am more comfortable with who I am not.

Over the years I have found friends like me, displaced from their tribe because they don't speak the language, because they don't follow the religion, because they're gay, because they are somehow different. We enjoy our own tribe and find the humor in our similar experiences of not being accepted. I now goodheartedly laugh when I get mistaken for someone else's tribe, which has led to some interesting conversations with strangers. I am less reactive when Spanish speakers ask why I don't speak the language. I have Mexican and Puerto Rican friends who are understanding and encourage me to learn Spanish at some point, which is a nice change from those I met in the past.

I still deal with my lack of language skills, though. I am back in school and planning on transferring to a four-year college that requires two semesters of a foreign language. If I had just learned to speak Spanish as a kid, I could easily test out of the requirement. Instead, I will have to learn a language in college which will cost a moderate amount of time and money. This would be a great time for personal growth and I really should take two semesters of Spanish to learn the language of my ancestors and connect to the culture. I have Spanish-speaking friends who I know are happy to help develop my skills. Yet, despite the supposed wisdom that comes with age I am still defiant and stubborn, so I will probably end up taking Arabic or Hindi just to try to get more free appetizers.

#### Works Cited

"Cross-race effect," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross-race\\_effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross-race_effect), accessed 15 September 2018

# DESPERATE HELP FROM THE KARDASHIANS

---

MAYLE SOBIESKI

“Six, twenty-six, two thousand and nine.” These were the only words I could manage to float to the surface of my fuzzy consciousness. Paramedics asked me over and over if I knew my date of birth. I had the month and date right, but in my precarious confrontation with death the only year that came to mind was the year I graduated high school.

I felt like a character from *The Exorcist*: I was positioned with my back stuck to the ceiling like a mouse stuck to a sticky trap. Alive but not. I was stuck there unable to move as I watched paramedics carry me out on a stretcher. I was having an out-of-body experience. I expected to feel cold or sad, but the best description of what I felt was nothing, an absence of both emotional and physical feelings.

A flash of cold hit my body like a truck. I was no longer stuck on the ceiling but inside an ambulance. A fifth shot of Narcan was injected, and holy fuck did it hurt. The lights

flickered with every bump in the road, and with each bump I got the sense of acid being pushed further and further through my veins. The flickering lights made my eyeballs feel like they were on fire. Everything hurt, starting with my bones and ending in my fingernails and absolutely everything in between. This was the Narcan doing its job and kicking the opiates out of my system so I could breathe. Narcan puts you into instant withdrawal, totally kills the high.

I was cold, and I was mad at myself. Not for OD'ing, but because I had wasted almost \$500 on heroin and about \$50 on a handle of Jameson. I was positive the police had ransacked the house while I was out. I prayed that at the very least they left the whiskey since it was the only legal substance in the apartment. The \$550 plus I had come up with that day was from a long, drawn-out con that I had worked on for almost a week. How could I have let all of that go to waste? All of my hard-earned profits just flushed away with a shitty four-block ambulance ride and a sampling of drug charges.

It was October 26, 2013. I remember this date not because I faced death and survived but because it served as an imposter sobriety date, a date that I had to write into a daily journal for an Intensive Outpatient Treatment group I have no memory of consenting to.

One would think that being clinically dead for eight minutes would be a reason to pursue sobriety immediately. For me that was not the case.

Fast forward to January 3rd, 2014, the most awful and most celebrated day of my life. The day I was arrested.

I was sitting with my legs crossed on the damp cement floor, positioned in front of a dirty mirror that had been once mounted to a wall. I had been evicted from my apartment and had nowhere to live except for my parents' mossy basement. At some point during my brief hospital visit I asked to contact my parents, and like many other things during that period of my life I have no memory doing so. As far as I was concerned my parents believed I had been sober since moving in.

I was feeling oddly motivated after my last shot of heroin and decided to trim my bangs. I grabbed a fistful of hair and made the first cut with the dullest pair of scissors I could get my hands on. I heard multiple sets of footsteps coming down the stairs but didn't give it much thought. I gathered another fistful of hair to finish my botched rendition of self-

care. Before I could even look up to see who had come downstairs, the scissors were knocked out of my hands and I was handcuffed. The haircut made for an interesting mugshot.

Not many people can say that jail was the best thing that could have happened to them, but I can. I'm one of the lucky ones.

I found that alerting the C.O.'s of my alcohol addiction that was closely intertwined with the opiate addiction was a waste of my time: they took it as drug-seeking behavior (which was only partially true). I felt entitled to a level of respect that I had failed to give to anyone else in years. I was more afraid of the alcohol withdrawal than the heroin. You can die from alcohol withdrawal, but only feel like you are going to die with heroin. I laid on my cot angry, exhausted, and unable to sleep. All I wanted was to crawl out of my body and run far away.

The lights came on at 4:30 AM and everyone was instructed to stand at the end of their beds for roll call. I had struggled to sleep that night, and it had finally happened fifteen minutes prior to the wakeup call. I tried to be grateful for those minutes. I counted thirteen other women in the pod, and they all stood in silence rubbing the sleep from their eyes only to discover that their breath could be seen. We stood there for almost ten minutes, waiting for someone to take inventory of us. Finally, someone arrived and unenthusiastically rattled off jail ID numbers that sounded like positions in line at the DMV—our names had no value in this place. After roll call was complete the C.O. informed us that the heat in the jail was out and that no extra blankets could be supplied because the jail had hit capacity. She slipped a remote control out of her utility pocket and turned the caged television to Keeping up with the Kardashians and left without saying anything else. I was sure I was in the Arctic layer of hell.

I spent the entire day trying to sleep, but my body wouldn't allow it. The Kardashians' whiny voices somehow managed to be louder and more present than my own thoughts. It was Kylie's 16th birthday and she wanted to plan her party without her mom's help. I rolled my eyes at every "woe is me" story that the sisters had. Khloe was having marriage issues with Lamar, Kourtney didn't understand why Khloe and Lamar didn't spend time with her, Kylie was mad because her mom wanted her to clean her room, and Kris was taking care of a baby pig. I had no option but to become invested in the show because it was the only escape from me that I had. My eyes grew tired of rolling at every

meaningless dilemma, until Rob Kardashian came on. I had no idea what his backstory was, but it seemed like everyone was trying to instill their values onto him. It was obvious he had hit some kind of low in his life, but his family wasn't necessarily being supportive. While having a heart to heart with Khloe he set an important boundary and informed her that he was going to move out of her house. Heartbroken, she asked why he made that decision and he simply responded, "I am in desperate need of helping myself." I didn't roll my eyes.

There was a welcoming committee waiting for me when I walked out of that jail. My parents had piled fourth-fifths of my siblings into the Suburban and had everything set for a road trip to rehab. I was supposed to have a police escort, but my mother had been very busy that week working closely with my judge. She convinced him to let her drop me off. I am the eldest of six children, and the youngest is eighteen years younger than me. Max, at four years old, handed me a Subway sandwich he selected just for me and then started asking me a whole slew of questions. He was very curious about jail—up until then jail had been nothing more than a hollow threat used by my parents when he would misbehave. I was still detoxing and the smell of the roast beef in the hot car made me want to puke. I told him that he needed to be a good listener and always follow directions because jail was not a fun place. I also told him it was filled with monsters. The questions stopped coming after that. I asked if we could stop at a bar so I could have a shot before I checked into rehab. My parents didn't acknowledge me.

Rehab felt like high school, except this time everyone was equally as messed up as I was. We shuffled around in groups divided by sex to various rooms where caseworkers, therapists and counselors sat with clipboards and offered forms of cognitive therapy. We were all heavily medicated on drugs that made us compliant. I didn't try to make friends with anyone—I knew that it would be a waste of time. 40 to 60 percent of these people were going to relapse and possibly die, and I was also part of that statistic.

Even with medication I couldn't sleep. I spent my nights in a TV room where I finally had access to a remote. I watched a J.D. Salinger documentary every night for 30 days, not because I enjoyed it, but because everyone else thought it was boring and it gave me the room to myself. Salinger spent a lot of his later years living alone in a shed

on his property in New Hampshire. I found Salinger's level of isolation admirable.

As soon as I fell into the routine of rehab my 30 days were up and it was time for me to figure out where my life was going next. My mother had given me \$20 when she dropped me off at rehab to pay for someone to finish the haircut I started. I held on to that money until my last day with the intention of spending it on drugs as soon as I got out. I paid for a haircut and then I was off to sober living.

The house mother was 81 years old and stood with one hand on her hip and the other pulling a cigarette away from her mouth. We were standing in the living room of a place that I was to call home for the next year of my life. She went over the rules with me.

"If you don't make your bed in the morning, you will use," implying that lack of tidiness was the number one cause of relapse.

"You must be home by ten-o'clock every night." She said it slowly, then proceeded to tell me a story of how two girls weren't home by curfew and were found days later in a ditch, dead, naked, with slits on their necks, which was obviously a result of not being on time and not the other way around. Her last rule was no smoking in the house, which she said with a smile. What had I gotten myself into? The messed-up part was I actually remembered consenting to this one.

The following year in this house was a crash course on being a functional human. I had to do things like pay my bills, go to work, make meals for myself and, of course, make my bed. These tasks were so familiar yet so foreign to me after spending years of lying, cheating and stealing as a way of means. I probably had close to fifty different roommates in my four-bedroom house that year. The 40-60 relapse statistic was real, and each month that passed I was more and more grateful for not being part of it.

After a year of unlearning everything I thought I knew about myself and rewiring my brain as if I was an infant, it was time for me to leave. I had proven to my support system and, most importantly, myself that I had instilled healthy habits to carry on and continue a sober life. It was time for me to give my bedroom to another woman who needed it more than me.

The past six years of my life have been the most beautiful and the

most rewarding. I've rebuilt stronger, more meaningful relationships with my family that I once believed irreparable. I've learned how to make and maintain healthy friendships. I've also learned how and when to end friendships that are no longer healthy. I went from washing dishes to cooking professionally in five-star restaurants. I went from isolating myself with drugs, alcohol and vinyl records to isolating myself in a healthier way. I isolate myself with my partner of almost four years, backpacking for days at a time and climbing up literal mountains. My life today has more depth, and I can honestly say that I'm grateful for all of the hardship. Without the hardship I would not have what I have now, and just maybe if I didn't hear Rob Kardashian say, "I am in desperate need of helping myself" I wouldn't have been able to climb far enough out of my ass to relate to another human being.

# MY TIME IN A MENTAL HOSPITAL

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KELLI FERRANTE

I had not slept - not really - for two nights, and my body was weighed down by all thoughts ever had. I felt this too much. Mom was upset. She was angry, confused, disappointed, flustered, and so very tired. This made us, though on separate sides of a moving vehicle headed towards the emergency room, the exact same. When I entered the ER, though, the nurses treated me like a delicate albeit chipped China dish. I sat small and cross-legged on the hospital bed while large grown-ups waddled in and back out, running tests, measuring blood levels, and the circumference of my heart. And when the nurse said to me, before leaving, "You're doing the right thing," I broke. And everything was fine. And everything was steady, though I shook incessantly and cried and cried. But the ER was only destination one.

A policeman called me "miss" and escorted me back through iron gates, the unlocking of which would only be permitted by the presence of a very special card within grasp

of a very special person - NOT a person whose loosely tied gown only weighed heavier on my even looser chimpanzee breasts. The policeman showed me to a large white room withholding many smaller white rooms and said, "The best thing you can do while waiting to be transferred to Oakview is sleep." Ha! I thought, "The only thing I cannot do is sleep." How easily, he said it, too. How simple.

My nurse's name was Greg and he, along with every worker who resided within the supremacy of The Great Overlooking Glass Box, was a trickster of time. "The medication for your chest pain will be ready in ten minutes," I remembered forty-five minutes later, sitting down at an unfinished bird puzzle in the large white room. When it finally did come, I downed a clear, thick liquid that instantly made me nauseous, before starting up again on a chalk-white, slightly sweeter substance in a separate cup. By the second gulp of the plaster-pale concoction, my throat formed a large lump and everything began to stick together. I ran to the bathroom and started guzzling sink water. "What is that," I gasped, "what did you give me?"

He repeated, "It's for your chest pain." I was pacing now. "My throat is closing," I said, heaving. It was only after I started choking on another sip of water, Greg standing beside me, watching, almost bored, that I got angry. "What did you give me," "I think I'm having an allergic reaction," and "is this what the medication is supposed to do," were foaming like poison in my mouth as it became more and more difficult to swallow. Greg, along with the other staff member and a boy around my age stuck in there with me, did nothing. They did not show concern. They did not react. They were flippant, dismissive, and, out of all things, irritated by my "performance." The numbness of my lips and throat eventually receded, but my frustrated confusion at their lack of response, as well as the heightening delusion to the entire situation, did not. Greg never did tell me the name of the medication. I do not think he even knew what it was.

I AM SCARED, was the only truth in my head. It was then that I recognized the unfinished bird puzzle as one I had seen before: I had set it out for an elderly dementia patient while working at Comfort Keepers as a caregiver. My brain started to tick. The feeling of utter dread came upon me then, and I knew: this was going to be an excruciatingly long night. Five hours later, at 8:45 am, I was transported to Oakview via gurney and

was finally allowed to put on a bra. "Better. Much better," I thought while one of the staff members showed me down a hallway with painted walls of serene forestry. After about half an hour of psychological interrogation from one of the nurses, I was prescribed medication for severe anxiety and mood swings. My stay at Oakview was only four days long, but full of lessons- some harder to take than others.

In a mental hospital, you are alone. Aside from the group therapies, it is your job to support yourself. I found myself griping with a mildly dismissive staff and also having to remind those at the nurse's station which medications I was prescribed, at what dosage, and when I could take them, several times. Seeing as I was doped up with the meds they had already distributed, this was a somewhat difficult and concerning task, but I reasoned with myself: "Being low on their priority list only means that they are least worried about your mental state, therefore, you should be too, Kel. You're not crazy - and if you were, the nurses would pay more attention to you than they are now. Take it as a compliment: You're manageable." This was something to keep my fear at bay, but still not enough to calm me. This was the truth: I needed a human being to look me in the eyes and say, "You are going to be okay."

The one prevailing factor? My fellow "psychopaths" who often showed more empathy and humanity than the people whose jobs were to be sympathetic and supportive.

Laura was a mother. She was kind and sweet and cared after everyone, but drew special attention to a man named Daniel who was special-needs. "Danny, you're so funny," she cooed to him while his boyish smile spread from cheek to cheek. It was as if she saw the child in everyone, and made it her sole mission to make that child feel loved, because that's what children need.

Trevor was a player, and he knew it, too. "I'm hoping to exchange some digits while I'm here," he said to me once in the tiny cafeteria. "So, you came to a mental hospital to find a girlfriend?" I replied. It was like he was taken out of a dark comedy film and placed haphazardly into a psych ward somewhere in Northeast Ohio. His slightly dazed mannerisms and far-away glint in his eyes seemed to reflect his unconscious acknowledgement of this fact. And that is a good word for him: unconscious.

Jordan believed he was a God, but had never once let his arrogance over this deter his compassion for others. He watched lectures of

psychology professors from far away cities for fun. He spoke in brilliant rhymes from poems and raps created within seconds in his intricate yet tortured mind. He assured me, after there was an outburst from one of the more distraught patients, “Don’t worry, I’ll protect you.”

Mary was a creature of another kind. Her main place of dwelling was the activity room, where she was often found scribbling in coloring books, making humorous commentary on the television program she was watching, and writing down her facebook username so that others, after they were discharged, could reach her if they needed to. She was the girl who would smile at me everytime I walked into the room and said, “Hey Kelli,” in a deep tone that made it feel like we had our own personal joke that ran for ages and ages, despite the fact that we’d only known each other for a couple of days. She was special and sweet and loveable beyond anything else. She was discharged the same day I was, and when we said goodbye, she cried. “I love you,” I called out after we embraced. “I love you too,” she replied.

I cried, too, when I got home. During my stay at Oakview, my mind ran wild with concern over how my family would take me back, and how I could possibly re-enter the severely mundane life I’d been living before my breakdown. Worried thoughts zoomed like hijacked train cars in my head: “What if my parents are scared of me?” “What if I have another meltdown?” and, the most pressing, “How do I find me again, if I ever had it at all?”

I was finally released into the real, cold winter air of early January. My dad drove me home, and despite my fear, my need for familiarity made my entire body tremble. I ran into the house, calling my dog’s name and already beginning to sob. Bruno’s ears flattened to his irregularly small peanut-head, and they stayed that way for a long time, both during and after our reunion. My dad bought a book for us to work on together, called *Improving Father-Daughter Relationships: A Guide for Women and Their Dads*. As for my mother, she held me and held me. Several nights after that, when I had another terrifying panic attack, she held me and held me some more and said,

“You are going to be okay.”

# “INTO THE SEASONLESS WORLD”: WRITING AS LIVING

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WILLIAM ELLIOTT

My earliest memory is my mother lifting me up and setting me down next to the other children at a homeschooling group. I remember how her hands dug into my bony ribs as I kicked wildly and screamed a childish scream that scraped my throat and pierced the quiet murmurs of the room. My mother, bless her heart, took me to hundreds of these homeschooling groups, 4-H meetings, and natural science museums, where I always clung closely to her and the other parents, too scared to speak. I feared what the other children saw in me: that which I could not see in myself.

I hated how I looked. My Harry Potter wireframe glasses, my crossed eyes, my girlish hair, the snot on my sleeves. I know now that all children are like that, in one way or another. At the time, though, I was so preoccupied with my flaws that I was unable to hold a conversation, to speak to strangers, or to even say my name. Part of this was due to a lack of experience,

but part was due to a crippling fear of embarrassment—of being observed. I wanted to be an ideal, a person I dreamt of being. I could only be the flawed, clumsy person I was.

I retreated home, dreading being seen or heard. I remember climbing up our built-in bookshelf with its chipped white paint, stealing and reading whichever book had the prettiest cover. The beautiful and frenetic drawings on my mother's copy of Julius Caesar, the shining silver chainmail hood on her copy of Beowulf. My love of visual beauty became one with my love of literary beauty. They made me forget myself, forget my alienation and loneliness for a while. I clothed myself in the identity of the author, and thereby hid my own identity.

The most important book I have ever read was on that shelf, with a stained jacket and a soft-featured face on the cover. It was a book of prose poems by Kahlil Gibran, regarding a prophet giving his insights on various topics: love, friendship, joy, sorrow. That book, *The Prophet*, is such a popular book that I almost feel embarrassed to mention its importance in my life for fear of seeming trite; however, I cannot deny how life changing it is. The beauty of this book was unlike anything I had read before or since. Baudelaire and Rimbaud, the other prose poets that I had read, I felt in the logical, conscious part of my mind, seeking out mere symbolism. Gibran, I felt in an indescribable, silhouetted part of my mind; it was not only a beautifully, deftly written book, but one which made my heart race and my eyes burn with tears.

I pilfered that book and read it again and again, underlining and writing down the lines I loved most. There is a certain line which still splits open my heart, years after first reading it: "And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?" (Gibran 29). I remember the days where I would sit and read it on the windowsill, with that soft wind pressing the world into the empty room. I remember the nights with such a chilling cold in my chest and a dullness in my mind that I read "On Joy and Sorrow" until I felt a renewed warmth in my heart.

As an anxious, bookish child, I sowed a loneliness which I reaped as an adult. By the time I was nineteen, the slow-motion car crash of my childhood had collided with the concrete wall of adulthood. A million moments were filled with a vacuum of silence, stillness, and quiet. I read until I could no longer stand to read, my eyes simply passing over the

words, moving thoughtlessly over each line. The exception was Gibran. His words demanded attention. Just as Dante's poetry "glowed like burning coal" in that old song, each line filled me with a courage, the kind of bravery which fills the hearts of fools (Dylan). This kind of courage is necessary to live; no one would go on first dates, write poetry, or sing songs if they were not at peace with the fact that they would likely be laughed at and ridiculed.

This foolish courage forced me to accept my identity; a cliché, to be sure, the kind of platitude that is written on wall art; however, the commonness of this experience makes it no less profound. Part of this acceptance was gained through reading—Gibran, principally—and part through artistic creation. Journaling, originally one-person talk therapy, became identity creation. I wrote because I felt that I had to. There was something forcing the pen down, writing words that I felt too embarrassed to say, drawing scenes too humiliating to mention.

"Writing writes you as you write it," said Coetzee; for me, it crystallized my identity into something undeniably real (17). It became a freed identity that was based on the blind faith that the unknown part of my mind was worth prizing; that it should not be hidden away. The creation of art, regardless of the audience (for me, no one) and the critical reception (or lack thereof), proves the worth of the artist. As a child, I was paralyzed in fear of judgement from others—art has made me care very little. I do not think that any artist should care in the slightest about what others think of the spirit of their art, their soul which shines through the gaps in the paint. It cannot be destroyed or changed; attempting to do so simply bolsters it.

There is, admittedly, an element of experience that soothed my anxiety. It was much easier to speak to the cashier at the grocery store the fiftieth time than the first time. My first time driving a car was very different from my thousandth. All the while, though, my identity played the lead role. Without confidence in my identity, I would not be able to do even simple tasks like grocery shopping or driving. Now, I do not fear people seeing me for who I am: a lonely child, a depressed adolescent, a sentimental adult. If I did, I would draw the blinds and drape sheets over the mirrors.

Thus, I have no choice but to live without fear. I reject the fear of my identity being criticized. It is like the art I prize most: it is sourced from

living, from pain, from joy. I cannot hide it any more than I can cease living. "All writing is autobiography," continues Coetzee, and therefore all writing is living (17). Both require the same foolhardiness (i.e., courage) as it requires to live a full life. To live in fear of this judgement is to live half of a life. Gibran writes,

But if in your fear you would seek only love's peace and love's pleasure,

Then it is better for you that you cover your nakedness and pass out of love's threshing-floor,

Into the seasonless world where you shall laugh, but not all of your laughter, and weep, but not all of your tears. (12)

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# SILENCE IS BLISS

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AMANDA BITTNER

I feel his hand in mine as he leads the way, something that is so normal for us but to onlookers probably seemed strange; I couldn't care less about that though. The autumn air blows through my hair, the cold nipping at my neck; making me shiver. I shifted my body closer to his, absorbing myself in my friend's warmth. He stops us in our tracks, lifting the hand that was already gently placed in his. Opening up my hand from a fist, revealing my palm he began to sign to me in the unique language of tactile ASL. It works by him making shapes with his hand in my palm, making motions by guiding my hands and arms, or squeezing certain points of my hand.

"Are you okay?" he asks with slower movements than usual. It wasn't like him to "speak" slowly like this. Most of the time I have to stop him and ask him to slow down, so I was a bit confused but kept things casual and signed back.

"Yeah, just cold," I respond, offering him a smile hoping that would make the sudden tension I felt going on between us disappear. For the past few days things just didn't seem right. His hands were a lot shakier and this was the first time he's started a conversation with me in a week. Scott's quite the

chatter box despite his inability to speak. Over time he's gone completely deaf and he finds it hard to talk normally so he sticks to signing. The two of us have been together for years, our entire childhood actually. My life just wouldn't feel right if I didn't have this big goof by my side. We complimented each other perfectly. He's my eyes and I'm his ears and we work together to take on the world. It's a beautiful system if I do say so myself.

"You want me to take you home?" he asked, yet again signing like a beginner trying to learn the ropes of the language. I decided to let it go; I could ask him later. Besides I'm freezing my ass off out here and I would much like to be home under my fluffy blanket with a cup of hot apple cider. Yeah coffee's not my thing. What is with people's addiction to the drink anyways? Like with how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop, the world may never know. I eventually responded to his question with an okay and he held my hand in his once again as he walked us to my house, the silence that always lingers in the air feeling uncomfortable compared to the usual calmness it normally does.

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Guiding me up a trio of stairs he opened what I assume to be my front door since I heard a long loud creak. Dad should really take a look at our door.

Entering the house, we were greeted with the booming voice of my mother who I could only hope was signing as well to keep Scott from feeling left out. As I removed my shoes my feet finally felt free from its tight confines. If it was socially acceptable to walk everywhere either barefoot or with socks I would so do that.

"Lucas, there you are, I came home to an empty house and I got worried." Scott detached his hand from mine, probably to sign something to my mom in our defense for being late. I don't necessarily mind not knowing what he's saying, he's good with persuasion. Besides I would probably ruin our excuse if I knew what he was saying. I'm a terrible liar, people always see right through me. There's not much she can say against us anyways. My mom knows nothing bad will happen as long as we're together, that I'll be okay and the same goes for his mom.

"I'll be in the kitchen, hun," my mom said, lowering the volume of her words to what kindergartners would call your indoor voice. I gave her a

nod and reached for Scott's hand but couldn't find it. Slight panic came over me as I stayed in one spot spinning in circles searching for my friend probably looking like a dog running in circles failing to follow a scent. After a torturous few minutes a rare but angelic soft chuckle filled my ears as I felt his hand on my shoulder and my heart rate slowed its erratic tempo. Damn him, he probably just stood there and watched me panic like an idiot, but it was kind of worth it. I love the little moments where I can hear a glimpse of his voice again. His family and mine are the only people who have ever heard Scott's voice. His voice was amazing and it's a shame the world will never hear it.

It's true when they say you don't know what you have until you lose it. I'll probably never hear his full voice again, nothing more than the small noises that give away his mood. Yet the silence isn't always bad. It could be quite calming, and I strive for quiet. Being blind people are always talking my ear off, many speaking louder than necessary.

"I'm right here" He signed to me after a long moment of no words between us.

"Do you want to stay the night?" I signed but he responded by signing a quick "No, I'll go."

Nothing about his actions were like him. He never denies a sleepover, usually it would be him begging to spend the night. I don't understand what's going on but I only nod not wanting to ask him what was wrong just yet. Jumping to conclusions was a habit of mine, over thinking things that ended up making absolutely no sense to anybody but myself. So, it was better for me to wait and examine him more.

"See you later," he signed before wrapping his arms around my waist as he dug his chin in my shoulder. I could feel the soft skin of his cheek brushing against my jaw making my face feel warm as I returned the hug. Releasing me all too soon he stroked my cheek and I couldn't hide my burning blush. Without another sign the squeaks of his shoes on the hardwood floor flooded into my ears before the slam of the door shattered something inside me and a million questions bounced in my head.

Did I do something wrong?

Why did he do that just now?

Can I really take the next step and do what my heart wants?

Would he accept it?

Accept me?

I walked with my hands outstretched looking for the wall as these ridiculous thoughts plagued my mind. My mom must have noticed my zombie walking because she appeared behind me beginning to tell me something managing to scare me to the point that I wound up slipping on the floor, landing on my butt. She let out a squeal and helped me to my feet placing my cane in my hand, the smooth plastic feeling warm to the touch. I thanked her with a smile before walking to my room, gliding the cane on the floor searching for my bedroom door. Once I found a door, I moved my fingers along the rough wood searching for the braille plaque that spelled out my name. Finding it I move my fingers along the letters

L-U-C-A-S R-I-V-E-R-S

I smiled remembering when dad went to have this small thing made. He screwed it into the door himself, happy that this would help confirm which is my room, and ultimately stop the unpleasant bathroom disruptions. Since then there were more plaques to come, titling each room in the house.

Turning the goosebumps inducing cold metal knob I walked into my room, finding my bed and plopping down face first on my soft comfy pillow. Silence now takes over and the only thing I wanted to feel was his hand in mine.

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I was leaving the school building on this once again windy Friday. Rolling my cane across the bumpy ground I walked slowly feeling the breeze of other students rushing past me. Without warning fingers interlaced through mine. I turned my head towards where I assume he is and smile. He squeezes my hand and I hold out my cane to him. Releasing my hand, he takes it from me, and the small cracks let me know that he's separating and bending it, making it small enough to fit in my bookbag. Two quiet zips and his hand was back in mine. I followed him thinking he was leading me home but when we were walking longer then we usually do I grew curious. Trying to get his attention I gave his hand a squeeze. Having worked he loosened our hands and began to sign.

"What's up?" He asked, movements still slow. It's been almost two weeks now, why does he seem so nervous?

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.”

“No, I won’t. I’m blind.”

“You know what I mean.” He walked on with me by his side. After a good walk he stopped me, grabbing my shoulders positioning me where he wanted me to stand. He signed to me asking me to sit down. I did as he asked sitting on a flat surface that felt like stone to the touch. Scotts body moved closer to me and taking my hand he moves it towards a mass of wetness.

“Where are we?” I asked not understanding why he brought me here.

“The fountain. Remember how we used to come here as kids, throwing our coins in, thinking our wishes could really come true?” I smiled at the memory of our childhood. His voice, the mummings of people in the small park, splooshs of the fountain, the kerplunk of our coins drowning in the water, and like always, his hand holding mine.

“Yeah, I remember.” I responded, signing as slowly as he’s been.

“What did you ever wish for back then? You would never tell me.” I bit at my lip, not wanting to answer. He would laugh at me if he knew the truth.

“It’s stupid.” I responded trying to keep my nerves at bay, but my hands trembled without my permission.

“Do you really think I would care? I already know you’re an idiot.” It helped that he was so close, and I shoved his shoulder playfully. He giggled his now soft laugh and it sent my heart a flutter.

“Do you really want to know?” I asked, my shaky hands growing worse.

“Is it that bad?”

“Not necessarily.”

“Then tell me.” I didn’t sign for a while, thinking over the possibilities on what his reaction would be. All the pros and cons being quickly listed through in my head. Well I guess telling him my wish isn’t the worst thing. He may tease me a bit, but at least some of the weight that I’ve been carrying for a few years now will be released from my shoulders. I’m not telling him my feelings, I’m just telling him my wish, so it should be alright.

“It’s you, I wished that I could see your face.” Nerves are making me shiver as I sign.

I want to say more

I want to say so much more.

But I’m afraid.

What do I do now?

“Lucas?” He cut off my thinking with this sign and began to draw shapes and lines on my palm. His finger almost tickles as he draws, and my mind begins to form letters.

I

Okay, I think he’s going to spell out a word. When he was a kid on bad hearing days before he learned tactile ASL he would spell things he wanted to say on my palm. I wonder why he was doing this now?

L

So, IL? Ill....., illusion....., illuminate.....?

O

An O? ILO? The “I” must be on its own then.

V

Wait a minute? Don’t tell me this is a dream because if it is, I don’t want to wake up.

E

I can’t think straight anymore, my heart’s pounding too hard, it’s like a caged animal trying to escape.

U

He stops there placing his hand on my cheek, stroking his thumb back and forth slowly. I lean my head into his hand, and I am surprised by something soft and slightly wet touching my lips. It’s a nice feeling, the taste of pure sugar took over my taste buds. I never wanted it to end. My chest explodes and all my emotions are directed to my mouth. How is this even happening right now?! I feel like an eternity has passed before he releases from the kiss.

“Was that okay?” I don’t respond, I let the blissful silence continue.

Trailing my hands up his arms to his shoulders all the way until I had my hands cupping his cheeks. Pulling his face close to mine I answered his question by returning my lips onto the one and only boy that deserved them.



# ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, **AMANDA BITTNER** is attending Tri-C trying to discover her passions but her dreams are to become an author.

**ELAINE BRUNSCHWIG** is both a student of photography and a professor of Biology at Tri-C. She has enjoyed taking photographs most of her life and decided last year it was finally time to go back to school to get her degree in photography.

**NYALA BURNETT** is a student at Cuyahoga Community College.

**DAJA CLARK** is a one of a simple nature who enjoys creative expression. Writing has always been a passion of hers since childhood but poetry is new to her spectrum. Vulnerability is a challenge that she is fond of confronting, and her imagination is something that provides infinite structure to any work that she partakes in, alongside providing consistent comfort. All of what she does helps her acknowledge patterns, recognize love, helps her gather patience, and allows for her to take accountability of her life.

**MATTHEW CONN** is a twenty-three-year-old college student that loves video games, movies, and books. In his free time, he enjoys writing poetry and working on various writing projects. He has plans to pursue a bachelor's in English with the intention to become a professional writer or novelist.

**DINA DAKDOUK** is a 19-year-old 2020 Tri-C graduate and is planning on pursuing a bachelor's degree in engineering. Dina has loved reading non-fiction books that take her through different worlds and has recently found an interest in writing. As of now, she plans to continue taking creative writing courses through her college years.

**COLLEEN EAST** is a recent resident of Cleveland. She moved from the Appalachian mountains of Virginia and began attending Tri-C, where she is now studying for an Illustration degree. She paints as well as writes, and was a recent nominee for the League for Innovation Juried

Art Show. While her current submissions to Breakwall are poetry, she also dabbles in prose, and is working on a novel in her spare time.

**WILLIAM ELLIOTT** is a multidisciplinary artist and writer pursuing an Associate of Arts Degree from Tri-C's Metropolitan Campus. William is passionate about creating artworks that emphasize transience and process, and plans to transfer to a four-year university after graduating from Tri-C.

**COLLEEN FEE** is a photography student at Tri-C and works as an Occupational Therapist. Photography has always been a hobby of hers and last year she decided to go back to school to pursue a photography degree. She has a love for being outdoors and enjoys birding in the Cleveland area.

**KELLI FERRANTE** is a student at Cuyahoga Community College pursuing an Associate of Arts degree. She plans to further her writing career by earning a Bachelor's degree in English with an emphasis on creative writing. She is a certified yoga instructor and animal caregiver.

**DONALD HEALY** graduated from Cuyahoga Community College in spring 2021. His photography journey began at age 11 when his grandmother gave him an old camera and he began photographing animals. Though he now specializes in sports, animals will always hold a special place in Donald's heart as his favorite photo subjects.

**KRISTEN JONES** is a current nursing major at Valley College and a graduate of Tri-C. She enjoys writing and producing music as well as poetry. When she is not studying for classes or working, she spends her free time with friends and family. Kristen loves animals, helping out her community through outreach programs, and helping other women realize their potential.

**ANGE LAO** immigrated to America from southern China in 2012. She devoted herself to her academic studies while taking breaks to relax herself with visual and writing arts. Today, she is continuing her high school education while dual-enrolling in Tri-C through CCP.

**WAYNE NAGY** is an aspiring poet, a college student interested in non-profit work, and a barista. He loves nature, coffee, and all things spiritually related to his Native American and Scandinavian ancestry. He

draws his inspiration from the unknown and the natural world as well as deep within himself.

**TERRI J. PATTON**, writer, songwriter-singer, and painter, is a former Tri-C student. Born in Ohio, Terri was long time resident of Los Angeles, CA. She travels the world to satisfy her curiosity for life. Presently, Terri is the coordinator and assistant to the director of Gallery East, the Tri-C Eastern Campus art gallery.

**MARK RODRIGUEZ** returned to college after a 25-year gap and is a current Tri-C student who plans on transferring to Hiram College to get a Bachelor's in Business Management. A Texas native, Mark lived in California for 17 years before moving to Cleveland in 2006.

**MAYLE SOBIESKI** is a returning college student who is pursuing a degree in business and humanities. She has spent her entire work career working in the service industry as a cook. Cooking will always be a passion of hers, but she is looking to expand her life and not limit herself to only kitchen work. Mayle is a new member of the Cleveland Humanities Collaborative with Case Western Reserve and plans on transferring to Case full-time after she obtains her associates degree at Tri-C.

**NICKEA TAYLOR** was born in Cleveland, Ohio, the oldest of Yolonda Mullins' 5 children. She has 4 daughters and graduated from Sandford Brown College as a Medical Assistant in October 2006. She is also a Nursing Assistant, and her passion is helping people. Nickea has returned to school at age 46 to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse.

**MIA STANFAR** began her higher education at Cleveland State University and later transferred to Tri-C to complete her degree in Visual Communication and Design with a concentration in Graphic Design. Mia is a born and raised Cleveland girl who has a unique interest for organization and for things to be extremely neat. As she continues her career, she hopes to take on more publication projects, like Breakwall, as well as opportunities in branding and marketing.

# ABOUT THE SELECTION COMMITTEE

**SOFIA ALVA** is a dual student attending both Ohio Virtual Academy and Cuyahoga Community College. She plans to graduate with a minor in creative writing while majoring in general psychology. After attaining her bachelor's, Sofia also plans to further her education by acquiring a Ph.D. in her specialty.

Though she is currently attending Tri-C to earn a certificate in the medical field, writing remains **RAVEN BOYNE's** passion. She also enjoys reading, drawing, and legally touring historical and forgotten places. She hopes to publish her work and eventually pursue a Master's in Fine Arts.

**BRITTANY DAVIS** is currently attending Tri-C to earn an Associate of Science degree with a focus on Information Technology. A proud member of both the Tri-C Honor Society and the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, she is a full-time mother and student and currently resides in Lake County with her fiancé and their two children.

**GRACE DUBRAVETZ** loves to read and write. She is currently a sophomore at Cuyahoga Community College, where she is a Mandel Scholar, Mandel Continuing Scholar, and Cleveland Humanities Collaborative student. She is also involved in Phi Theta Kappa. She will graduate in Fall 2021 and plans to pursue her BA in Philosophy.

**KRISTINE NOLL** is a summa cum laude graduate of the Visual Communications and Design - Photography program at Tri-C. She is a graduate of Ohio University and worked within education for over a decade before attending Tri-C. She currently works as the education coordinator for a local environmental non-profit, Drink Local Drink Tap, and freelances as a photographer. She hopes to combine her passions for photography and environmental sustainability to bring positive change and inspire youth to become future leaders.

**ALEXANDRA SAMAME** is an avid reader and is working on improving her writing. Besides those passions, she also enjoys running, watching Marvel movies, and playing with her dog and kitten. Alexandra is

pursuing an associate of arts degree at Tri-C. While this has not been her ideal freshman year of college, she made the most of it. She chose creative writing as a “fun” class and was so glad she did because it was her favorite class all year.