

CARNATION



AN SWC ANTHOLOGY

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**The Storytelling Workshop Club is proud to present *Carnation*, an
SWC Anthology!**

Preface

“With freedom, books, flowers, and the moon, who could not be happy?”

- Oscar Wilde

I hold the personal belief that writing reveals that truest part of ourselves. That through literature, we reveal the most vulnerable parts of ourselves - our insecurities, our pain, and our love. You can't write without tapping into the humanity that lies inside each and every one of us. Our society began on the basis of the spread of stories, and it will continue because of that.

With that being said, thank you everyone for submitting your work to this publication. We couldn't have done it without you! The SWC was a small club back in the day, and now we've grown beyond our wildest dreams! It's been a great pleasure collaborating with all of you and getting this publication out. We can't thank you enough!

- *Jeffry Purnomo (he/they), Treasurer, Biomedical Engineering Major*

I'm extremely grateful and proud of all of our club members and everyone who submitted into this publication. This semester's "Carnation" publication is the club's third physical edition. "Carnation" contains many pieces by the student body that represent their perspective, creativity, and chaos. While reading and looking over everyone's pieces, I could not believe how enriched and immersed I was in all of the stories being published. The club has flourished and grown a lot since it was originally organized, and I look forward to continuing to work hard to help it grow even further.

- *Sydney Lee (she/her), Liaison, English Rhetoric Major*

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I'd Rather Wake Up To Schumann

By Julian Sharpe

Alarms are absolutely, positively, undoubtedly the worst creations known to man. In a little box, a phone, or other, you get a device that is capable of producing the most infernal, PTSD-inducing racket one will ever hear in their life, all for them to be kicked in the ass after they realize that they need to get up and be a human in society for the day. Doesn't matter if it's school or work or showing up for a date that you know you should not be going to—it's a man-made object that informs us of our toil as a part of mankind.

I'd probably seriously say this if I actually woke up to alarms all my life, because I didn't. My parents, although almost always my father, would wake me up. I would be delighted by a gentle rub on the shoulder, an "it's time to wake up", and a groggy me would stumble through my apartment to hop in the shower. Rarely would I actually make an effort to wake up right as they told me to, and I would stay in bed for about another ten minutes. By that point, I had already narrowed down my walking commute to school to know exactly which minute I would be late, and which minute I would be just in time to swipe my card and be marked as "present."

I was only ever late until my senior year of high school, when it didn't really matter whether or not I was on time.

By then, though, I was using alarm clocks, and it was hardly a pleasant experience, as I'm sure the majority of the first world population would understand. In fact, "unpleasant" is more of a gross understatement to the horrid blaring of rage that emanates from that little black box on my dresser. No wonder movies show the overworked, underpaid "wage earner" slam their fist on it.

I'm a light sleeper though, so I would almost immediately wake up to them. There were a few exceptions: one time, the alarm invaded my mind so particularly that the gigantic, black spire that had appeared in my wasteland of a dream began to belt out the same notes as the alarm, before I quickly realized that I was in fact still back home, and the alarm was getting louder. I never had Apple products, save for an iPod my mom had when I was in elementary school, so while I never experienced the comically horrifying iPhone alarm, I still remembered the sound of my own alarm, so much so that any sound similar enough would give me a twinge of anxiety—microwaves being the worst offender. It's almost an insult to injury when you realize after you've been so rudely awoken that you also have responsibilities. Leave me alone in my thoughts.

Since starting college though, I've been using my phone for my alarms, and my Samsung Galaxy has the option for me to gracefully rise to the Schumann Piano Quartet. Long story short, it hardly helped. I mean, yes, it is much better than whatever evil standard alarms are, and at least I can listen to some nice classical music, but I just can't shake the fact that there is something that is waking me up to do something that I hardly want to do. The function is still there. I could wake up to the heavenly strings of the pearly gates and I would still be appalled.

I'm appalled because no matter what wakes me up, I am woken up nonetheless. There's a lot of things in life that are like that, at least for me. There can be some incredibly fun, heartwarming, enjoyable experiences to be had that day, but I am still going to have to get out of

bed and will my body to do those things. I could be starting a process that is long and strenuous but will lead to great results for my life and my achievements, yet I would still resent having to do it at all. Work, school, life—it all needs a start.

Sleep is the opposite of that start. Sleep is the idle, the undoing. I heard someone once tell me that you cannot truly do nothing, as doing nothing is to do something; but sleep, like death, is the closest thing we can get to doing nothing. In fact, death is perhaps more active than sleep. In death, we decompose. We add to the cycle of nature through our dead body. In death, people remember us, and talk about us, making us the center of a conversation, or the center of memories. And if there is no one who talks about you, you still will have people walking by your tombstone and reading off your name. And if you have no tombstone, then you simply refer back to point A, that is, your provisions to nature.

Sleep, however, puts you in a state of superposition. A state of indisturbance. No one willingly wants to wake someone who's sleeping, and if they do, then there must be some reason for it that supersedes sleeping itself. When one is truly asleep, with nothing to wake them, it's like they exist less than those in death. In death, you can talk about someone virtually however you want, because they will not be there to hear or do anything about it. When you're asleep, people can relay to you what was said. When you're asleep, you're on power-saving mode. You have no legacy, only achievements, but those stay with you wherever you go. Everything that is permanent with your body stays regardless of status, yet in sleep, everything that isn't, leaves. True, you lose the qualities that kept you alive in death—like your breathing, your heartbeat—but you gain legacy with death too. Sleep has no legacy. Sleep is unclean. Sleep is vulgar. Sleep is vague.

Of course, this is all just rambling. It doesn't actually matter when you're asleep or when you're awake or when you're dead. All I know is that in order to be asleep you need to start again, much the same way as a candle cannot exist without an end. If a candle burns infinitely, it's no longer a candle, but simply a light—and if sleep is infinite, it's no longer sleep, but death.

I'm not a very deep sleeper. I'm easily woken, and I'll only sleep for lengthy periods if I'm completely exhausted from the day. But I still cannot get out of bed. A reason for this that I've played around with is not that I have a love of sleep—it's that I have a fear of waking up.

Waking up, I have to be a human. Waking up, I have to experience the world. Waking up, I have to be exposed to all that kills you.

The easiest thing to do is to never wake up at all.

The Carnation Field

By Wade Tang

TW: Death

The first time Mara died was when she was only ten years old.

It was an accident, kids being kids, roughhousing, which ended up with her death in the river. It wasn't a pleasant experience, dying, but it was also not as bad as her friend Yama made it out to be. The worst part was becoming deceased in the first place, which was painful, but afterward, it was like floating in a dream.

There was no cold, no heat, not even the sensation of the wind against her skin. Mara was simply alone, trapped in a strange land without a single soul present in her surroundings.

It was a strange place. In this strange land, she stood in a large crimson field with golden rivers of ichor flowing next to her. In the distance was a temple that stood amongst a field of carnations. From the middle of the temple, a large incarnation of the flower stretched out into the sky. She began to walk towards it, feeling a strange pull from it, egging her to approach it. However, the more she walked, the further the temple seemed to be, always out of reach in the distance beyond.

When she came back to life, she was pulled out of the body vat by her doctor. The woman gave her clothes, some food and water to provide some energy to the newly grown body, before pushing her into the waiting area. She shivered while glancing at the many children who were sitting there with her, all of them shaken by their first experience with death.

The memory of the water filling her lungs as the river current swept her away while her friend Yama tried his best to rescue her, reaching out to her. She heard the jeering of the older kids who pushed her in as the water filled her lungs while she thrashed, trying to surface, while reaching out towards Yama's hands.

She yanked her thoughts from the memory of her death and focused it back to the vision she had while in the land between life and death. The strange land felt familiar somehow, as if she had been there before. It also felt like she had finally come home after so many years away, and that she had finally reunited with a part of herself that she left behind there.

The second time Mara perished was when she was fifteen years old.

She was hanging out with her childhood friend Yama, in the cafeteria. He was a strange boy, obsessed with gods from old religions in the past and could talk for hours about their history and mythology. Despite his eccentricities and obsessions, Mara never tired from his stories, enjoying her time with him.

On the day she died, her friend asked her a strange question. Yama asked her what she thought about the immortal life so far.

She was confused about his question, and so Yama explained that the people in the current era lived like immortal beings. They were able to resurrect and come back over and over again without the repercussions of death. Even the gods would be envious of such an ability, to cheat death over and over again. However, he wondered if humans were ever supposed to have such an ability.

Mara thought about it, but decided she quite liked living as an immortal. She reasoned that death was an inherently negative aspect of humanity's nature, and that conquering it was a good thing. Her childhood friend disagreed and believed that mortals shouldn't have the ability to conquer death, since it is the only thing which regulates them. Mara scoffed at this and retorted that humanity is now allowed to make its own fate and decisions.

Yama's last words to her was simply, "Humanity was always allowed to make its own decisions. Death is not evil nor is it cruel. It simply is."

Before Mara could answer, the both of them died right after as bullets ripped through their skull, which interrupted their conversation. On that day, it turns out that two sons fighting over the same inheritance had both hired a hitman each to kill each other during the lunch hour. Many kids were caught in the crossfire, because both sons believed that they deserved to inherit the fortune, and wanted to demonstrate it.

Mara's second death was quicker compared to her first as a bullet pierced her skull, landing her back in the strange land between life and death yet again.

This time she was in the temple, lost in one of its many hallways which were filled to the brim with ichor. She could see the large carnation shaped tree in the center, but no matter how long she walked, she could not reach the center. However, as she walked, she seemed to sink deeper into the ichor, slowly but surely, but the pull was always there.

When she was returned to the land of the living, she was pulled out of the body vats by her doctor. She was wiped down from the fluid that her new body was grown in before being given

new clothes. As she was led into the waiting room, she was handed a gray protein bar and a cup of water to provide some nourishment to his new body.

She followed her doctor while wearing the plain gray clothes which were given to every person who was resurrected within that facility. Though different tier of insurance existed which demanded different treatment, the doctor of this facility ignored such demands. The doctor provided resurrection service to everyone in the area, but gave everyone the same treatment when they came out.

As she sat down in the waiting room, she saw the two sons who hired the hitman to kill each other. Both sat there ashamed, their hubris bringing them down so low, and their aspiration having destroyed them. However, amongst the crowd, Yama was nowhere to be seen, and later, he would be reported missing.

The final time Mara died was when she was twenty-five years old.

Her last memory was walking down the road, passing by unmade shops and dusty homes, without much comment. It was all the same, but eventually she came across a bridge that looked out over the river. There she could see the great city of Amirax, gleaming in all of its glory.

Mara looked glumly at the city, and she could feel a longing to go into the city, maybe for just one day. The city's skyscrapers stretched out towards the sky, their ivory colors contrasting against the dark and bleak night sky. The buildings around the skyscrapers twisted and contorted with strange architecture gave the city the appearance of a strange forest in a lost realm. It gleamed in the night sky, giving a sense of awe to whoever looked at it.

Mara couldn't help being overwhelmed by the feeling of anger and envy as she stared out at the distance.

She had lived amongst the poor and desolate for most of her life along with her family. They lived and died together in this neighborhood for many years. Her parents had lived hundreds of years in the area, never able to escape, until five years ago, when they disappeared with her sister.

Now she was alone to fend for herself. She worked until she was skin and bone and lived off scraps to keep herself alive. She always wanted to one day reach the city of Amirax, but now it seemed to be an impossibility. She blamed her family, her friends, and Yama for abandoning her in such a state, and now, all she wanted to do was escape.

That day though, she had a meeting with her doctor, one that the old woman requested. She made her way to the area and walked through the doors into the resurrection facility. There sat her doctor, the old woman who had brought her back to life twice in her childhood. The woman nursed a small bowl of soup within her hand.

"How long has it been, young Mara?" The old woman asked.

"It has been years." Mara answered as she sat in front of the woman. "Tried my best to stay alive."

The old woman let out a small chortle before placing her bowl on a side table. "I understand." The woman looked up at Mara. "You have grown so much though."

"Not enough apparently." Mara grumbled. "I am miserable and destitute. Every day I stare out the window at a dream I can never have, thanks to a family that left me behind."

"Everyone has their time to go. It was simply their time Mara." The old woman simply answered. Mara raised an eyebrow, confused about what the old woman meant. "I mean that they didn't abandon you. Leaving you was the hardest decision they ever made, but they simply couldn't look past it forever."

"What do you mean? Aren't we all immortal?" Mara scoffed bitterly. "We have technology that can cheat death. They abandoned me either way."

"Humans never cheated death. Death simply allowed them to find their own path back to him." The old woman explained.

Mara was even more confused by this statement. She tried to think of a way to respond, but in the process, realized a very important question she never asked. "I never caught your name doctor."

The old woman smiled. "My name is Meng Po. You may call me Lady Po."

Mara let out a gasp. "I have heard that name before."

Lady Po nodded her head with a small smile. "I am sure you have. So did your mother, father, and Yama."

Mara quickly sat up. "You know where Yama is?" She questioned fiercely.

Lady Po nodded. "He was here like you, and forced to make a decision."

"And what is that?" Mara asked.

Lady Po took her bowl of soup and walked over towards a small pod that sat in the middle of the room. It looked different from the other pods that were used to resurrect people from death. It had a smooth, obsidian coloured exterior, with a silver interior.

“If you wish to know where he went. You must enter the land between life and death once again.” Lady Po simply answered. “There, you will find your answers.”

Mara hesitated, but after a short time of deliberation, she followed her doctor's instructions and crawled into the pod. She shivered as the cold, viscous liquid in the pod touched her skin. However, she eventually submerged all of her body, except her head which she rested against the edge.

Lady Po took her bowl of soup and handed it to Mara, who took the bowl with some hesitation. “Drink it, and then close your eyes.” Lady Po explained.

Mara hesitated, but she looked up at Lady Po. The old woman had helped her when she died in her childhood, and then several more times when she was injured. The old woman also seemed to know her parents quite a bit. She also didn't have much to lose anyways in her miserable life, so she drank the soup.

Shortly after, she closed her eyes and felt herself drift into a deep sleep. She felt a jolt as her consciousness was pulled out from the land of living. When she opened her eyes again, she found herself in the strange land yet again.

This time though, she stood in front of the large flower that sat in the middle of the temple. The carnation towered over the entire area, but around its stem were tinier flowers that circled around it. The smaller flowers were still as big as a person though. As Mara walked around them however, she saw that the inside of the flowers held human faces. Each face had their eyes shut, and their expressions one of deep relaxation.

She looked away from the flowers and turned her focus behind her. She saw that there was a river of ichor separating her from the other side of the temple. On the other side of the temple was a large pool of ichor which seemed to go on infinitely. Standing in the middle though, was none other than Yama. He looked much older than Mara remembered, seemingly having aged while in the strange realm.

“Yama!” Mara exclaimed as she stepped into the pool of ichor. She pulled back as it burned her skin, recoiling at the pain. Yama seemed to have heard her however, looking up at her, and smiling.

Yama gave a small smile. “Missed me much?”

“Where did you go?!” Mara cried as she stood along the edge.

“I arrived here. Is it not obvious?” Yama smiled.

Mara looked at the pool of burning ichor which gave off a repugnant stench. She looked behind her and saw that the flowers actually grew over the people who chose to stay at the flower. Next to the flower were two doorways where white light shone out of them. It seemed to tease her, saying that it was a way out of the temple, that she can either live her life in bliss, or return to the living world as an immortal once again.

However, she rejected those two and turned back to Yama. The boy she once knew extended out his hand, and gave her a reassuring smile, the same one he would always give when he said that things would be okay. Every time, she trusted him, and every time, he would turn out to be partially right.

So Mara stepped into the pool, bristling at the burning sensation. However, she continued forwards towards Yama and focused her attention on the boy she once knew. The further she continued, the deeper she sunk into the pool. As she continued forwards, she could feel her memories ebb away, but her focus on Yama always remained constant.

By the time she got near him, she was neck deep in the pool. She stretched out to reach him, but her head dipped under the liquid before she could reach him. As she sank into the depths, she felt someone embrace her under the liquid.

“I won't let you go again Mara.” She heard Yama whisper in the darkness. “I am sorry for leaving you behind all those years ago, but I had to go. It was my time.”

Mara smiled and could feel her old grudge fade away. “It's okay. We're here together now.” She whispered as the two faded away.

Somewhere, in a field, a new carnation bloomed, and two new children were born, ready to move on together.

Blooming Heart

By Alice Li

TW: Blood, Gore

Beep. Beep-Beep. Beep.

The steady heartbeats rang throughout the room as the doctor in white stood before a bundle of golden carnations. The bouquet surrounded a well-preserved record player, ready for the dark metallic disc Carina held between her pale slender fingers.

Pushing the record into place, Carina pushed a loose strand of brown hair away from her face before slipping on vinyl gloves as she hummed to the classical piece playing.

Gloved hands grab the face mask by the flowers, a yellow petal drifting to the floor as she places the covering on. Footsteps light, the brunette approaches the operating table beside a cooler, picking up the scalpel sitting innocently alongside other surgical tools.

Gazing at the woman before her, Carina caresses the patient's face, letting a sigh slip out of her mouth. "You won't feel a thing, my love," she whispers, gently pecking the sleeping Greek's lips.

As the piano and violin blended with the increasing beeping heart rate in the background, Carina breathed out before placing the metal knife onto steadily moving tanned skin. Sliding the scalpel from her chest to her rib cage, she watched the thick maroon liquid slowly trickle from the cut tissues.

Pushing open the wound, unbothered by the blood splattering onto her pure-white dress and transparent gloves, the doctor grabs the next tool needed to cut through the breastbone blocking her way—the stryker, also known as the pizza cutter in her lover's eye. Letting out an angelic giggle at the memory, her grip tightens around the handle and lets her fingertip press the on switch.

As the machine grew louder, overtaking the looped classical music, Carina began cutting through the breastbone of the patient before her. Watching as a flood gushed out, staining both women and the table beneath crimson, Carina's vision was engulfed in red as her eyes glistened with excitement.

With the combination of the soft melody, rapid beeps, and dripping overwhelming Carina's ears, her face flushed similarly to the blood pouring out of the dying woman. Her heart hammered against her chest, breath quickening, hands trembling as she stared at the beautiful moving heart in front of her.

Letting out a shaky breath, the pale brunette begins the procedure. Steadying her hands, not wanting to make a single mistake, she slices through the protective sac protecting the heart. The heart monitor grew louder and louder, as Carina tried to identify the correct vessels to cut in order to detach the heart from the body—*finally*.

The beating organ gradually slowed before coming to a complete stop in Carina's trembling grip, the monitor having gone silent during the operation—unnoticed by the giddy woman. She placed the bloodied heart into the bin of ice, replacing the vibrant flowers, before covering the box.

In her hands were a bundle of crimson-red and blush-pink carnations. As Carina returned her attention to the deceased, she fiddled with the carnations, unsure what to say.

“I won’t forget you,” Pastel-pink carnations slip from her fingers, in place of the missing heart.

“I won’t move on,” The pink petals soaked in blood were no longer in sight, as vermilion carnations took its place.

“My love bleeds for you, and your heart for me.” Arranging the remaining flowers in hand, as closely as she could to a heart, she sets them into the empty bloodied hole in the body. Carina’s eyes softened with a faint smile on her face before turning away.

Disregarding her filthy gloves in favor of new ones, Carina carefully removes the still heart, moving to her untouched counter. A glass container sits, filled with ethanol. She thoroughly washed out the four chambers, needing the end result to appear as pure and beautiful as her girlfriend was.

Hanging the heart into the jar, she tightly sealed it. Holding the jug up, Carina’s mossy green eyes shone with amazement and fondness. The bloodied woman sets the jar on the indented shelf of the wall, adjusting it a couple of times for the *perfect* look.

Admiring the view, she shivers in disgust at the sight of her stained clothes. Carina began the annoyingly long clean-up process, switching on the news channel, and listening while she began to mop up the blood pool underneath her now-dead lover.

Snow slowly drifted down behind the reporter, who had started speaking of a new topic, a matter she became quickly interested in. “Leaving the groom standing at their wedding, the bride Azalea Vitalis has been reported missing as of yesterday. The description of the youn—”

“The gods brought us together,” Carina crushes the remote off button with a sweet smile before flicking on the shelf light.

“Together we shall stay.” She breathed out, basking in the beauty before her.

The jar appeared purple as the ray bounced off the surrounding violet carnations, *‘My Flower, Azalea’* glistening under the limelight that illuminated the frozen heart.

Can't Describe It, or: A Short Story With (Probably, Hopefully) No Adjectives

By Adriana Stasiak

TW: Angels, unreality

Aenon was a list of things now. “A bore” was not a thing on this list, but he was, nonetheless, a variety of things he had not been in the past – such as standing on Mayavin’s doorstep at 2:30AM.

He smiled as if this was something he did before. Outside, the wind tossed the leaves around and threatened to rip away the cape he had pulled over his shoulders.

“I need help,” Aenon said.

Mayavin stepped aside, and his guest glided past him.

A stranger on the street could easily see the majority of the things Aenon was. His hair fell over him like a veil, his eyes called attention to themselves, his stature gave the impression of a candle that had been lit, extinguished, and then relit, time after time. He had the pallor of something that had been left out in the sun for years and years, and also a halo, antlers, and six wings made of feathers.

That white stood out in Mayavin’s house the way the sun would’ve stood out at night. The beads and metals around the room glimmered like stars in his glow.

Mayavin considered reigniting the fire so as not to focus on Aenon too much, but it had apparently started back up without his input.

He was used to this.

Aenon sat down and picked up a teacup from off the table for no reason except to hold. There was nothing in it. “I’m looking for a rat.”

Mayavin didn’t dwell on that. He took a cloak in shades of midnight off the sofa, wrapped it around himself, and sat down across from Aenon. If it wasn’t for the golds accenting his outfit, he would have blended into the shadows. “What does it look like?”

His friend made hand gestures, then shrugged. “A rat.”

“Okay, but–”

“It’s a rat.” Aenon tilted his head so that it looked like he was in pain. “I... can’t describe it. There’s no way to describe it. It’s a rat.”

“What color?”

“It’s a rat.”

Mayavin put his head in his hands in a way that would not smudge his glasses.

“If I could tell you, I would.”

“I understand. Give me a minute.”

Aenon handed him the teacup.

It had masala chai in it, and the steam fogged up his vision.

“Thank you.”

They sat in silence, except for the fire. Once in a while, it would spark in colors that weren’t scarlet – residue from metals and minerals Mayavin had tossed in at some point in the past. The bursts cast shadows around the room – except around Aenon. He cast none, as always, and looked at the tomes lining the walls and crystals sewn into curtains instead of occupying himself with his peculiarities.

“Rat Two Nine Eight Three Four Oh Two One Nine Five Seven.”

Mayavin raised his head. “What?”

“That’s its name.”

“Does it have a nickname?”

“Of course not. It’s a rat.”

“Your rats at home have names.”

“That’s– Those are my pets. That’s why their names are in Latin. Rat Two Nine Eight Three Four Oh Two One Nine Five Seven isn’t a pet. That’s why I call it Rat Two Nine Eight Three Four Oh Two One Nine Five Seven.”

“Then it’s...”

“...A rat.”

“I see.”

“I... I have a lot I can say about this rat,” Aenon managed, “but they are things about its... experiences. Not things about its appearance that could help you.”

“Experiences?”

“It found a slice of bacon once.” He paused. “And fell into a hole between worlds.”

After thinking some, Mayavin put the teacup on the table. “Well, without a description, you can’t do charms for it. And I am going to assume you don’t have its hair or anything. But if that is its name, truly, then it simplifies things. Especially if this rat is...” He waved his hand as if to say, *You get it.*

He reached across the table to slide Aenon a notepad and pen. “Write it down.”

While the eccentric scribbled on the page, Mayavin headed over to a cabinet of mahogany and pulled out two handfuls of pouches, weighted with crystals.

That was supposed to be all they contained, but then one of them moved.

Mayavin jumped.

The bags fell to the floor. Quartzes and crystals scattered with all the clamor one would expect from rocks – but something darted out.

Aenon had still been writing, but he grabbed whatever it was in two hands with all the swiftness of a cat – not a human. He blinked, then smiled and held up Rat 29834021957. “There it is!”

Mayavin narrowed his eyes at the thing, looking for the words. “Well, it’s...”

It was a rat. It was... a rat. There was nothing to say except that it was a rat. There was *nothing* to say about it. He was looking directly at it, and...

He sighed, “It’s definitely a rat.”

“I told you.”

Soledad

By Dayana Lucero

TW: Minor panic attack

Breathe in... Breathe out.... I placed a shaky hand over my chest. *Breathe in-* A small ‘meow’ snapped me out of my thoughts. I smiled down at my sweet, four-legged Lucia as she jumped onto the dresser.

“It’s okay,” I said, “I’m ... I’m okay.”

I heard someone call my name from outside. Consuelo. I looked at the time and cursed. We were going to be late for class. I wrapped Lucia in a blanket and hauled her into my arms before rushing out to meet my friend. I opened the door and met Consuelo’s eyes. He smiled at me seconds before his gaze fell to Lucia and his lips tightened into a frown.

“Maybe you should leave her,” he said. “That way you won’t be worrying about losing her all day.”

“And worry about something happening to her here instead?” I asked. “No, she’s safer with me.”

Consuelo didn’t comment any further as we walked toward the parking lot. I was stroking Lucia when I noticed a girl watching me like I had three heads. She whispered to one of her friends whose face twisted into disbelief as she whispered back. I tugged on Consuelo’s sleeve and asked if I had something on my face. He said no.

We made it to our first class with seconds to spare. Lucia sat curled in my lap as I fought the urge to focus on her and give up on my notes. A chill shot up my spine. An invisible hand tugged on my insides. *Breathe in.... Breathe out...* Consuelo placed a hand over mine. *Breathe-* My gaze landed on two guys sitting at the end of the row. They didn’t bother hiding their stares and looked from me to the kitten in my lap. Lucia growled. I looked up at Consuelo.

“They’re staring again,” I whispered.

He glanced from the boys to Lucia and shifted her, so she wasn’t hanging off my lap.

“Just ignore them,” He said. “Are you okay?”

Ignoring the stares was easier said than done. I could feel them when I was trying to get limits to work with me, and I swore I saw them leering in our direction during dinner. Lucia grew more nervous and barely ate anything. I thought about asking Consuelo to take us home, but we’d already made it this far and I didn’t want to miss another chemistry lecture. *Breathe in...* I placed a small kiss atop Lucia’s head. *Breathe out...*

Lucia wouldn’t stop growling during the lecture. I tried offering her treats, holding her differently, and let her roam around for a bit, but she remained restless. The clock struck nine. I sighed in relief as everyone rose from their seats and rushed out of the room. It was pouring outside. Consuelo told me to wait under the shelter of the bus stop while he pulled the car around. Lucia wouldn’t stop fussing. I figured it was the rain. It was making me anxious too. *Breathe in...*

Breathe- I froze. There was no mistaking those two and their unrelenting stares that watched me from across the road. I pulled my phone from my pocket and tried to dial Consuelo's number, but I had no service. The boys exchanged a look and started walking toward me. I clutched onto Lucia.

"CONSUELO," I called. "CONSUELO WHERE ARE YOU?"

I tried getting back into the building, but the doors were locked. I called for Consuelo again. I tried the other doors, but nothing. Fear pulsed through my veins. They were getting closer. A loud blaring car horn rang past the rain, and I spotted the headlights in the road. I ran toward Consuelo who'd started to step out and shoved myself into the passenger seat. They were running behind me now. I slammed the door shut as we drove away. Consuelo demanded to know what had happened, but I was too busy catching my breath to say anything. They could have done anything. They could have hurt Lucia- I froze. There was nothing in my arms. I searched the back seat. I searched the bottom of the car. Consuelo asked me what was wrong, but how could I begin to explain what I'd done.

"Go back," I said. "Now!"

"What-"

"Lucia's not here!" I shouted. "We need to go back! Now, Consuelo!"

A blast of thunder boomed overhead as the storm picked up. My chest tightened. Tears poured from my eyes. *Breathe in... Breathe in Goddammit!* My body felt foreign to me. I couldn't breathe. I'd only thought of saving myself like the selfish moron I was. How could I leave her?! How could I be so stupid?! My head spun. Consuelo tried to calm me down, but it was dark and quiet now.

The sun was back when I woke up. Within seconds, I was replaying the moments from last night. My sweet Lucia... The door creaked open. Consuelo walked in, soaked from head to toe, gently holding onto something black and small. My eyes didn't leave the bundle in his arms until I was inches away from him.

"Is... is she?"

Consuelo said nothing. I closed my eyes and held out my trembling hands. *Breathe, Soledad.* The feeling of cold fur bit into my palms. My brow furrowed, and I opened my eyes. Instead of blood seeping out of open wounds, there was stuffing bursting from torn up seams. Lucia's olive-colored eye was nothing, but a green button hanging loosely by a thread resembling the pink line meant to be her little mouth. This had never been fur. I looked up at Consuelo who watched me as though I might combust.

"Soledad," Consuelo asked, "Do you remember what happened to the real Lucia?"

Breathe, Soledad... Breathe.

"Soledad," he called, "Are you okay?"

I brought the battered-up cat stuffy to my chest and buried my face close to where her heart should have been as my tears soaked into her polyester coat. This Lucia had never been warm.

Mobile Task Force Daybreak Prologue 1: The High Priestess

By Jeffry Purnomo

TW: Gore, animal gore and death, teeth, body horror, mentions of mental illness, blood, dark themes

Guild of Paranormal Containment eyes only

Subject Dossier

Subject Number: 1124

Classification: Level 2 Humanoid Anomaly

Metahuman Phenomena: Biokinetic capable of manipulating her own body to extensive lengths. Subject has been observed shifting parts of her body into various bladed instruments. These blades register an average BESS score of 3, making them some of the sharpest blades on the planet. These constructs are not composed of a metal alloy, but are instead formed of a biological material similar to bone. Subject is also capable of forming shield and blunt constructs, however, it has been observed that these require a greater degree of concentration to form. Subject also displays a high degree of regenerative capabilities, with the only exception being her heart, which is a theorized weak point. Phenomena is believed to have stemmed from extensive Type A paraphysical augmentation and experimentation.

Possible Liabilities: Subject has been diagnosed with PTSD and GAD. Weekly therapy sessions have abated the more severe symptoms, however, the subject has been observed to lose control of their metahuman abilities during times of great stress or panic. Further use of systematic desensitization training is recommended. Subject is a former civilian and wishes to return to her civilian life and family. Pending approval from Guild High Authority.

Discovery: Subject was placed into GPC containment following operation “Crimson Rabbit Hole,” in which a Red Legion compound was neutralized following reports of “high strangeness” in the surrounding area. Collateral damage resulted in the containment fields within to fracture, allowing 1124 to escape. Following a two-day manhunt led by Agent Donald Vauban, 1124 surrendered to GPC custody.

He lowered the rifle down towards the moist ground. He tried to ignore how the earth seemed to stick to his boots, how the ground was puddled with liquid he was sure wasn't water. Donald waved his palm down, signaling his team to do the same. Some were more reluctant than others.

He couldn't quite blame them.

Illuminated by only their portable flashlights was a grotesque sight. It was a miscellany of meat and bone, of blades and limbs. Donald could count five limbs from the view he had, but he was sure there were more, stored away or too busy regenerating to show themselves. He saw a whip-like tail slither behind a tree, its bony blades cutting deep swaths in the ground. He'd seen what they did to a great oak tree two miles back, and he didn't doubt they'd do the same to him.

Donald took a step closer to her, his open palms slowly raising.

“I'm not gonna hurt you,” he said softly. A branch snapping a way behind him told him she didn't quite believe his words. From the large mass of flesh that made up her lower torso emerged a toothy maw. Like a snake made out of tumors, it wriggled free of its meaty bonds and skulked towards him. A choked sob broke the silence, and the snake slowed its advance. It looked at Donald with eyes that were not there, before slinking back into a wall of meat.

“We know what they did to you,” she tensed up, her spiny tail halting its movement, “they won't hurt you anymore.” Another step closer, and she took a smaller step back. He could hear her breathing now, fast and tremulous as it was. He aimed his light up, and he felt his skin prick with goose flesh. Her missing person's report noted she had “brown eyes,” but the dark of night made them look black. Even from this distance, he could see how red the whites of her eyes had

become. Something quickly fell from above, trailing a shadow towards the ground. Another followed it. It took Donald a second to realize what they were.

Tears.

It hit him then how human-like her upper torso was. There was no abominable formation of meat, no gnashing teeth to speak of. Fair skin clashed with angry red flesh at her midsection. Her human hands were rubbing at her human eyes, trying to scrape away her human tears. He caught a glimpse of her face, saw a youthful visage stretched into something sorrowful. She looked no older than his little sister back home.

She was innocent before all of this.

“I’m sorry,” she said, barely noticeable over her sobs.

“It’s ok, Alice,” Donald responded, more out of instinct than command.

“It’ll all be ok.”

White walls consumed her vision, almost to a nauseating degree. Most of the doctors she’d seen were dressed in pristine white lab coats. Even the guards dressed in white, except for their bullet-proof vests and armor. The only break from the monotony was the observation window in her cell. There were cracks in the glass from the times she’d lost control of her powers. She remembered how terrified the doctors looked when a spiked tendril erupted from her side and darted straight for the window. It was their first time observing her. The glass had spider webbed on impact, and the researchers were quickly escorted out by some equally scared guards.

“Alice?” a familiar voice cut her from her train of thought. Alice gave a soft hum in response.

“Is something on your mind?” there was a warmth to the voice. It made her miss her mom, how she’d coo soft platitudes when she came home from a rough day at school. Alice turned towards the window, her eyes washing over her visitors. Two guards, faces concealed with black masks, with a woman between them. She was short, with her hair done up in a tight bun. She held a notepad and pen in hand, which she twirled absentmindedly.

“Are you,” she hesitated, stealing a glance at the cracked window, “scared of me, Dr. Canary?” She watched her therapist’s face. She couldn’t deny her rising dread as the doctor’s eyes rose for a moment, and her lips curled ever so downward. The doctor had hesitated, even if it was for the briefest of moments.

“Why would I be scared?” Canary said. Her face had returned to something close to neutral. But Alice had already received the message. She felt her heart beating again, hard and fast in her head. A bladed tendril shot out from her bottom mass. She tried to will it back, but her vision was already clouded by tears. There was a loud thud, and Alice felt the all too familiar recoil. She held back a sob, before casting an unsteady look at the window. Her eyes widened at the sight of Dr. Canary, eye level with a bony blade. The glass had held once again, with only light cracks forming this time. Dr. Canary hadn’t moved a muscle.

Person of Interest #4024

Alias: White Rabbit

Affiliation: Red Legion

Occupation: Type A Sorcerer and Paraphysician

Threat Level: High

Notable Attributes: Readily utilized human subjects in experiments

Status: At large

She was standing in a dark field. The ground squashed beneath her feet, as if still wet from rainwater. There was a gentle breeze, and as it blew past her, it felt like fingers running through her hair. It reminded her of her dad, of how he would ruffle up her hair after a long day at work.

Where was he now?

A white rabbit entered her field of view, like a beacon amongst an endless sea. Alice crept up closer to it, and spotted it feeding on something. Its head turned, with one of its eyes pointing towards her, and she could see a hand jutting out of its mouth. A sickening crunch cut through the darkness, and the rabbit finished its meal. It turned towards her now, sinew and blood dripping from its teeth.

Alice froze. The rabbit's mouth moved, but no noise came out. There were people around her, cheering and shouting, but no voices were heard. The rabbit was speaking, but there were no words. It gestured outward with its paws, and Alice realized what she was standing in.

Meat.

They were in a field of meat.

Alice realized she could hear something now. From the nothingness, a phrase broke through, clear as day.

“Chaos reigns.”

There was something in her. Something just beneath her skin. Her skin pricked with goose flesh, as images of gnashing teeth and wolves filled her mind. No, she was the wolf. She could feel the field of meat beneath her. It squelched beneath her claws. An eye rolled towards her, lidless and open. It was brown, like hers. It was crying.

She looked back at the rabbit. It was chanting now.

“Chaos reigns! Chaos reigns! Chaos reigns!”

She was angry, but she didn't know why. She was crying, but she didn't know why. She was hungry, and she knew exactly why.

She was running now, towards the rabbit. She pounced, and felt herself tear into the creature. There were no screams, just the sounds of ripping meat.

The chanting was behind her now, distant, yet it remained.

“Chaos reigns.”

Alice woke up, a puddle of sweat and tears beneath her. She didn't dare move from her spot in bed, instead she casted short glances at the dark corners of her room. Her rattled subconscious searched for any tufts of white fur amongst the darkness. She dared not look under her bed. Her skin prickled with goosebumps, casting a shiver down her spine. It felt like something was trying to escape from under her skin. So caught up in her terror, she didn't even notice that her legs had returned to normal. What was once a mess of ligaments and talons, had been reduced to a pair of human legs. Her toes scrunched up into themselves as Alice curled up under the covers, caging her eyes closed.

She couldn't bear to keep looking.

Runner Annabelle

By Elizabeth Bordt

TW: Violence, Mentions/Use of Guns, Blood, Death/Dying

There was no way she could salvage the skirt now. The muck and sludge of brackish water seeped into every stitch, every seam, and every thread of the cotton fabric, once a Christmas gift from her mother. If she had a choice, she'd stop running and squeeze out the muck. But there was no time, no chance, and no way she ever could.

The gunshot still rang in her ears. A sharp sound, like when she and her brothers threw snapper fireworks to the ground on the Fourth of July. Until that day, guns were an abstract thing, trophies mounted on the walls with the deer. Toys only grown-ups could play with. Now she knew she hated them.

The only way through this neck of the woods was the marsh. There was no time to question it. No time to swat away the mosquitos, no time to check for ticks. With any luck they'd fall off her skirt and into the water. Parasitic beings, both of them, that drained a body for all it was worth. She'd always complain about them when her father took her into the woods to gather firewood. "Daddy," she'd say, "I don't wanna get bit. Miss Bloom says the mosquitos and the ticks make you sick."

"To hell with your damn teacher, Annabelle," her father would always reply. "We got work to do."

This late in the night, no one wandered the marsh. The scientists and the tourists and the men without homes wouldn't dare roam this far. Nature was a monstrous creature at night, when the demons came alive with wide eyes and night-vision. But Annabelle had been running for so long, her eyes already adjusted to the darkness. It didn't hurt that the moon bathed the marshes and the trees in pale light. Once she'd gotten to safety, she'd thank the Lord for that blessing.

Safety. Where exactly was safety? She didn't know where she ran. She didn't know anybody. None of her relatives lived this deep in the woods. Aunt Grace and Uncle Jack would never believe her. They adored her father too much.

Annabelle finally reached the end of the marsh. With hulking footsteps she hoisted herself to drier land. Frogs and toads kindly hopped out of her way. Her white sandals were stained brown, and dirt was caught beneath her feet. No time to fix it. She had to keep running.

Where would she go? She had no money on her. No clothes, no food, no water. Her brothers. Why didn't she leave with her brothers!?! It would've made this less terrifying, but it would've given their father an easy target. Wherever they ran, she hoped they'd make it. And that she'd find her way to them again.

She tripped over a root. It was a gnarly old thing, connected to just as gnarled a tree. Deep ridges in the trunk, holes either made by animals or disease, and not a single leaf. Dead. A corpse. Nature could be a corpse, too.

She decided to climb. The tree was tall, over ten feet. If she stayed quiet, she might not be spotted. Plus, from up high she could see if her father actually followed. Up and up she climbed, using the skills she observed in her brothers. They'd climb the tree in the old backyard every afternoon after school, swinging on the rope and landing on their feet. Annabelle would watch

from the kitchen window as she helped her mother wash the dishes. As per her father's decree, girls weren't allowed to use the rope.

Her father was not a drinker. People thought he was, since he often stumbled about and got violent for no good reason. But as a pious man, he believed alcohol to be work of the devil himself. Of course, what he *really* meant was that his own father used to drink, beat him because of it, and the pain of all that never really went away. He'd hit his own kids sometimes, too, because it was the only thing he could think of to make it all shut up. At least, that's what Annabelle's mother always said. "Your Daddy's mind is real loud," she'd say. "But it'll go quiet again, eventually."

Did it go quiet when he shot his wife? Was it an endless cacophony of rage? Did it sing with the pop of the bullet into his wife's skull? Did it wail when the blood coated the floorboards? Did the echo of the shot ring in his ears like it did his daughter's?

He did it for a reason. His wife, the bearer of his three children, admitted something rotten. Something sinful. They tried to keep the conversation from their children, but all three held red Solo cups to the bedroom door to hear it all unfold.

"There's a man," she said to her husband, "and I've been seeing him."

At first, the father said nothing. The children heard footsteps pace back and forth, but couldn't be sure if they were the father's or the mother's.

"Please, Darryl," the mother begged. "Don't take it out on him. It's my fault. I know it is. You can be mad at me. I know I did wrong. Just, please, don't hurt him."

After a long bout of silence, Annabelle finally heard her father speak. "Why did you do it?" When the mother gave no answer, he asked again. "Why, Lilly?"

"Because you don't love me anymore," she said, voice trembling. "You haven't loved me in years. I'm starting to wonder if you ever did love me, or if you just wanted your mother to stop pressing you about getting married."

The father said nothing. Annabelle wondered what his face looked like.

"It's over, Darryl. I won't ever speak to him again. The kids won't hear of it. But I wanted you to know. I wanted to tell you the truth."

They both went quiet for a long time. So quiet, Annabelle feared they'd hear the panting breaths of their children pressed against the door. Her hands got clammy, and the cup began to slip out of her fingers.

Suddenly there were loud footsteps. Something clattered and smacked with ferocious intensity. Lilly's voice grew higher, begging and pleading with Darryl not to do "it." Annabelle didn't like the tone of her voice, desperate and clinging and drained of hope. She heard grunts and growls. Curses and damnations. She froze, unable to push her body away from the door. Her brothers did the same. None of them said a word. None of them let out a breath.

More shouts. More grunts. More yelling and kicking and slams and screams. It seemed the two parents were in an altercation. A fight. The brothers backed away from the door and rushed to call the police. Annabelle's body refused to move. As if it wanted to hear every word of this altercation.

Then came the gun shot. Darryl fired it. Obviously. "No girls are allowed to use guns," Darryl would always say. She knew. Like an alarm clock, the sound of the shot forced her body to peel away from the door and run. Her brothers did the same, opting for the back door while she took

the front. She ran across the driveway—which was nothing but leveled dirt—and into the woods beyond their property. Her mother was dead. Her father was a monster. And she had to run.

She was being followed after all. Creeping through the woods like a cougar, Darryl approached the base of the tree. She clung to the trunk like she used to hug her mother during loud thunderstorms, and buried her face in her arms. She held her breath, praying to the Lord above that he wouldn't see her. That he wouldn't kill her too.

This was how the deer felt. How the rabbits felt. How all the prey in all the woods felt for all of time and eternity. She was a rabbit, a baby bird, unaccustomed to the world around her. A world full of danger, of predators, of monsters. One was right beneath her feet, and if he looked up even an inch, he'd find his next victim. Like the mother, he'd slaughter her. Predators went after the weak links of the pack. Her father, when he hunted, always went for the limping ones, or the babies who strayed too far from the pack. Then he'd haul their corpses back to the house, flies buzzing in circles as the stench rose into the heavens. Sometimes she could smell fresh game from inside her house, inside her bedroom with the walls covered in her scribbles. She read fairy tales, stories of princesses locked in towers waiting for princes who would rescue them from danger. Now she knew why such stories were relegated to words on pages. In the real world, no prince would come. Only predators.

Her father looked up, took aim, and pulled the trigger.

Poems for Joe

By Nicolas Scagnelli

Boysenberry Heart

I used to anticipate
Walking with you through your garden,
Your arm in mine, picking at blueberries and daffodils. But now this garden is not our
peaceful home anymore.

I'm going to the blackberry garden,
Down the street.
Blueberries are reminders of painful days before We knew each other.

The blackberry garden is fresher.
There are roses buried deep in the fruity alcoves Of this new, fresh haven.
I don't like blueberries anymore. You shouldn't either.

The Dark Man in the Doorway

There's a dark man in my doorway
He's as tall as I am,
With long arms, and a wide frame
It's hard to make out what he looks like,
All I can see are his piercing, yellow eyes
The boogeyman stands there, taunting me, haunting me He speaks, in a distorted voice not
different than mine This ominous figure scoffs at me, laughs at me,
"They're just distractions from your true goal"
He says to me, as I get ready to spend the night with my friends All I can do is stand there, like a
deer in headlights As his dark gold irises see right through me

Earth

In my hand I hold the Earth,
A ball of mud
Full of life, full of hardship
So many little souls doing what they can A sphere of dirt,
Clinging to hope,
Like a baby to its mother
I want them to know
That I cherish them
With all my heart

Soul Song

Your soul clings to mine.
Everyday.
When I wake up, your dog licks my face. When I brush my teeth, your little sister
Asks if I can drop her off at lacrosse practice Tonight at 5:30, sharp.
Throughout the day, a nostalgic lily clings To the back of my shoulder.
This guarding flower flutters like Tinkerbell is right around the corner.
Next thing I gaze into are your
green pupils.

Your Glasses are Harmonicas

You got a new pair of glasses
after all this time.
I am so used to seeing your old pair
leaning on your face over facetime
at 11:00 pm at night.

those crooked, broken glasses
lay on your face, the way you lean
on my calloused chest.
your new pair of glasses are light
and cool, like a sweet pea.
I want to gently remove them,
and blow onto them to wipe away the marks. your glasses are always laced with my
finger prints.

Sunken Inside The Mind

By Joseph M. Cramer

Moonlight shown through the cracks of
My rigidly bent aluminum window shades.
Awake with night's high moon I wait,
Searching in despair's darkest corner.

Black mirrors of water devour my legs. Cold pricks my skin
her nails, sightless except for my blood steaming
radiating plumes of gaseous lies, pollutants of the soul.
With each breath I am rattled by her imperfectly capable hands.
She keeps me from escaping the fear's foundation,
The unknown. Unwillingly persisting, seldomly embraced, and
Temporarily subdued by the lantern lighting my path.

The cold burning of bone on frozen steel ignites my hand,
Disguising the lantern's flame, charring my flesh
And purloining the light.

The mind races in the dark.
mythical muggers behind innumerable corners,
their home was the dark alley you passed
On your walks home from school,
In the back, where the light did not dare.
In the back, they took a piece from you.
They raced to project it on the wall
To tell their story of their greatest selves
that constantly materializes in your mind.
A race to show the motion picture depicting the house they own.
Memories fade, but fear leaves it's brand
Scarred lifted skin, the structures they raised
Atop the real estate they own on your soul.

Struck by lightning invisible
Melodious thunder speaks to me.
"Run! shut your eyes and
Retreat into your controlled darkness.
I have lived in this chaotic darkness
Lighting nothing but fear in souls of the
So called introspective thinkers
Finding nothing novel or unanimous.
Lanterns in the darkness can only shine so far,
And the decipherers key to chaos, their lantern light
Is colored different, unique to all individuals."

"I shut my eyes for nothing,
Not your idle threats of your ability to scare me,
You are an invisible, imperceivable voice in the
Dark back alleys of my mind.
I can hear you, but your corporality is inexistent,
In denying your will, I've won this day,
I've made a heaven of hell,
Mental strength, the overpowering force in the dark.
Lighting my way through despair's caverns, darkness visible".

Bloom

By Emilee Coughlin

TW: Mentions fetus and the process of a baby growing

You start off small, microscopic.

You are a bundle of cells knotted together.

So small, yet already you are extremely loved.

You start growing like a seed coming out of the earth.

First into an embryo then a fetus.

You are the size of a golf ball and then an avocado.

Constantly growing, expanding into a beautiful human being.

A baby.

You grow

And grow

Until you are ready to show your petals.

Until you are ready to bloom.

And when you are ready,

We will all be waiting.

For you to bloom

Like a beautiful carnation.

Turning Green

By Skyler Sharpe

TW: Inner homophobia (resolved)

I have a secret
A dirty little secret
One of love that is the same

Love that is shunned
Disgraced
One that shall not be spoken

The love that I have is covered with green
A vile color

You can be green with envy
Jealousy
Resentfulness

You can be green with disgust
Repulsion
Loathing

But there is a green no one knows
A green of life
A green of love

The green carnation is a secret
The green carnation means love

The subtle life of this flower is a queer symbol
Once used by Oscar Wilde
For the premier of Lady Windermere's Fan

So I joined the ranks of Oscar Wilde, Elliot Page, and many others
I wear my green carnation and I wear it with pride
A secret symbol of who I am

Potpourri

By Yangzhou Bian

TW: Depiction of Funeral

He said, accept it.
My affection is like a carnation—
One that fades.
One that withers.
One that decays the moment it is to be in possession.
One that is sincere all has a time for expiration.
One that is true, is never enduring.

He was right.
He left and died, in the embrace of another.
And came back as a short line from a letter sent by a lawyer.

I took the dried petals from the potpourri.
In simmering water, boil all the years of waiting into a colorless tea. I opened the window and let the wind cool the mild toxicity.
I took a sip and poured the chagra into a pot.
I let them drop into the soil and went back to the painting.

In the window set of a craft shop,
Amongst thousands and thousands of plastic blossoms,
sits a portrait of motherhood.

In the shade of mourning,
Blossoms a red radiate carnation,
Overwhelming the blues of the sky.
The bluejays tilt their head in the direction where the lonely cardinal passed by.

To hold her, he dropped the umbrella.
Rain washed off the turf from his fingertips.
“Let be.”
She closed her eyes in the calming scent of the earth.
He held up the tears so that she could have a thorough cry.



A Looser Look

By Ava Voss

TW: Eating Disorder (Anorexia)

My pants are tighter,

But I don't wake

to see the sun

and roll over to

count the hours until

the darkness.

My pants are tighter,

But I sit cross legged in

My chair

And hold my pencil.

My writing, legible,

My hand— one palm, five fingers

no longer quivers.

My pants are tighter,

But instead of counting

Every calorie.

Piece of gum. 5 calories.

I perform subtraction

Of derivatives

In my head;

The difference of functions

Is the

Difference of their derivatives.

Perhaps I am smart

When I'm

not exhausted.

My pants are tighter,

But my eyes

Are lighter.

And the lenses

with black spots

Waltzing on the dance floor

Of my pupils

Have been erased.

My pants are tighter, but

There is

Not radio static

In my left ear, half-muted

Mouths moving
Mind
a drained battery.
My pants are tighter,
But I sit cross-legged
On the cold tile floor
No longer shivering,
And savor
The consoling warmth of
Ramen noodles
slithering
the tango to my throat.
My pants are tighter,
but the muscles in
my cheeks
now contract,
and I flash my white teeth-
without begging
mommy
for money
from my chores-
a checklist
of existence.
My pants are tighter,
But the fields
Blow with the breeze and the
Air is thick with laughter
Even when the
clouds scream thunder,
ROAR.
My pants are tighter,
But my mind is
No longer dithered from
My body
A balloon on a string.

So now I sit here
as
My pants are tighter,
And wonder
if I am more than

The stew within
Of blood
and clattering of bones.
But more so
its promise
inside the vessel

so.

Maybe,
Just maybe,
I will buy new pants today.

grief

By Ava Voss

a world you walk through raw and unskinned.

Raw Baby baking in the sunlight

raw, vulnerable, exposed.

incandescent glares shot through my soul. keys left behind shatter my glass. untied shoelaces
stumble my reality.

insides mangled but feet glide. tip toe.

don't breathe. don't blink.

tiptoe.

don't crack the egg.

don't crack the egg.

better to stay

alone with my

thoughts, snug.

don't crack the

egg.

all encompassing.

obliterated places are equal parts destruction and creation:

Pitch Black

Bright Light

Water

Parched Earth

Mud

Manna

make a home there,

your skin will grow, stretch, and mold, Sweet Baby.

Shades of Expression

By Clara M. Rodriguez

Sometimes, my own voice betrays me.
The right words won't come out,
and like a flower unable to bloom,
my attempt to connect wilts.

Have you experienced this?
When your speech fails to reach,
or words simply don't suffice
to bridge the gap between you and life?

It's why I like colors.
Their ambiguity gives flexibility,
enables us to stretch and
figure out how
to express ourselves best.

When I'm asked where I'm from,
I'm not quite sure what to say.
What is "home?"
Must it be a place?

My home is blue, tender and true.
Grey for comfort in pain,
also refreshing as rain.
My home is green too:
The color of growth.
His eyes glow red,
full of strength, life, hope.
My favorite person: the one I call home.

Are you turquoise,
fresh with poise?

How about mint,
rejuvenating with some sass?
Or maybe you're brown:
muddied like soil in the ground,
Hiding seeds of potential ready to be found.
Where do we come up with these
connections?
Why is blue calm and sad?
How does red represent both
love and anger?
In this world where words are often
inadequate,
might we communicate better
with colors?

People can be hard to describe
with words,
and for some moments, speech is often
imprecise.
Maybe that's okay though—
we can paint ourselves in
chromatic conversations and
shades of expression.

Perhaps that is what art is:
a language of hues
as vibrant and diverse as
wild carnations.
A messy beauty,
emotions painted on a page,
carved into clay,
simply us trying to get out
what it is we want to say.

Storytelling Workshop Club E-Board

Fall 2023

President: Jonathon Jacobson

Vice President: Alexandr Smalyuk

Treasurer: Jeffry Purnomo

Secretary: Skyler Sharpe

Liaison: Sydney Lee

Special Thanks

Graphic Design Artist: Adriana Stasiak

