

Unbound

journal

Fall

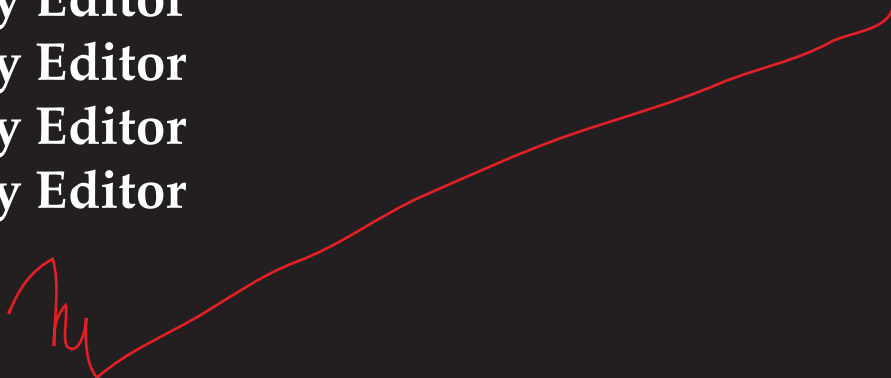
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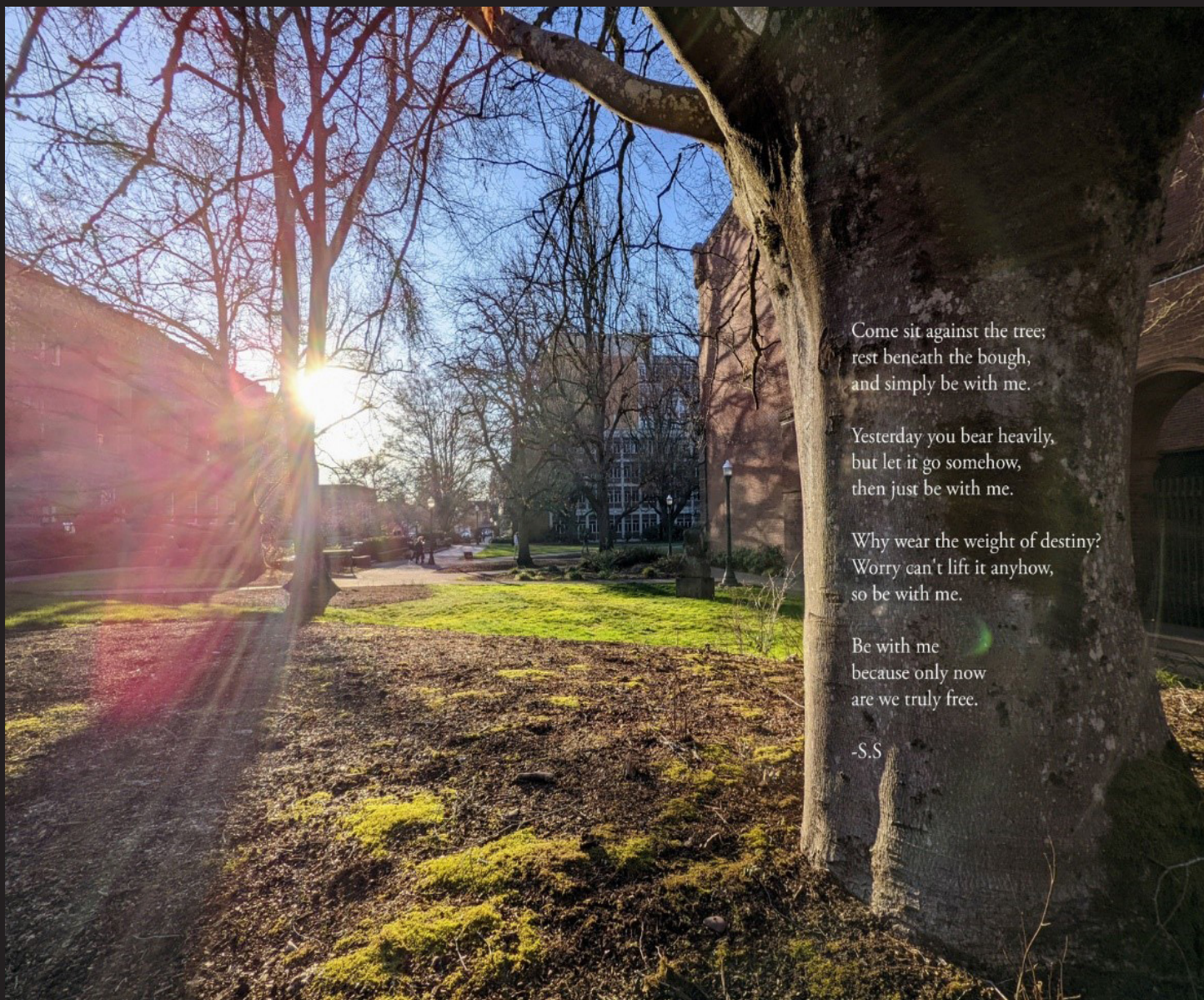
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“bewithme”



Come sit against the tree;
rest beneath the bough,
and simply be with me.

Yesterday you bear heavily,
but let it go somehow,
then just be with me.

Why wear the weight of destiny?
Worry can't lift it anyhow,
so be with me.

Be with me
because only now
are we truly free.

-S.S

Stephen Swanson

AARON HUDOCK: “UNTIL NEXT SPRING”

Just like the leaf misses their tree every autumn,
I miss you
and the friendship that was
as natural as the cells that made us.

I will always be full with the life and memories that you gave me.
Full of
 the jealous crimson,
 the warmest yellow,
 and the nostalgic green.

Yet I know my energy must be used elsewhere—
in the rich soil and
for the emerging caterpillars
until I dissolve into the cosmos from which I came.

No longer will I depend on your roots
that created me and so many others,
 others that painted you in unfathomable golden light,
only for you to turn them away
to protect yourself, like
the predator protects themselves by
eating the prey,

AARON HUDOCK: “UNTIL NEXT SPRING”

You gave me life
with sunlight and belonging,
and through life,
all must end like
the sun that sets nightly
on the carcass of wildlife

*I only wish I knew when
Will you remember me?
Until next spring.*

“Laugh Lines”

Today, I kept good company
With a 700-year old man
Named Hafez.
He was sweet, crude, wise
And far from dead.

I leaned my head on his shoulder
As he shared about the time
He jogged through Manhattan
All night long in just his undies
In order to request an autograph
From the Eternal Source.

She put up a clever chase
Through MoMA's galleries,
Across the Brooklyn Bridge,
Through the synagogue,
And in and out of subways.

Paparazzi found them outside
Papa's Pizza at dawn:
The Infinite Sky signing her name
On the lines around his smile.

Paige
Biersdorff

“At Midnight”

Anakin Welp

**Midnight found him
Hunched in a restroom stall
In the bar not from the
Swelling of too many drinks
But the atmosphere, thick
With the scent of sliced limes
And jovial sweat and cheap lager
Splashed from a glass,
That warm vibration of flesh and souls,
Blurring, numbing, yet loud,
Walled around him so
That he could hear but not touch,
Which danced and punched him
From the counter to the dark backrooms,
Where he would find comfort
Gripping a grimy white seat
That he could feel.**



“Average Day”

Stephen Swanson

“I guess I always assumed they turn the lights off once you’re inside an ambulance. To give your eyes a rest, like how masseuses dim the in-set fluorescents before suggesting you take your clothes off. But no, driving behind the well-lit emergency transport was voyeuristic. It moved as if carried on the backs of a million oily black ants, bobbing slightly at potholes but never faltering. The huge windows were magnifying glasses, telescopes. Surrounding streetlights threw static circles onto the ground, reflecting gutter water and fine grit glass. It was very still. The man lying in the bed was quiet and dense. I thought of paperweights. Mostly the kind that have a soggy flower enveloped in clear gel. I could’ve been standing there, right at the foot of the man’s bed,

“Anthills”

Kendall Smith

It was very still. The man lying in the bed was quiet and dense. I thought of paperweights. Mostly the kind that have a soggy flower enveloped in clear gel. I could’ve been standing there, right at the foot of the man’s bed, and it wouldn’t have been any different. The paramedic looked ahead, not at the man, or me, but at the edge of the aluminum box of the ambulance, where the corners came together. For some reason I thought that if he looked at me, we could share something. A joke maybe, a smile, something to say, “Yeah, I see him too, isn’t it bright?” But he didn’t seem to care much. He didn’t look. When the stoplights became few and far in between, I turned my headlights away from the glow of the back windows, which seemed now to be their own source of energy. The poor man was probably just trying to sleep.

The nervous turf of grey returned as I passed a Taekwondo dojo jammed right next to a drugstore, an abandoned drive-thru, and a memorial statue for the pioneers of the Oregon trail. Wandering tunnels dug into the sand, intersecting. I never liked how the dojo plastered pictures of kids kicking each other in the head all over the glass doors, as if a parent would see that and agree that violence is the best enrichment for young children already predisposed towards head-kicking. I don't know much about Taekwondo anyways. What I disliked most, though, was the way I still had to look around the bends in the road for any changes, like a shrub hemmed or a new birdfeeder. I just had to know if anything was different, because if it was, at least that was something to talk about

“Anthills”

Kendall Smith

It would be different, and I had to know that. I always assumed something bad would happen at night - there's never light where you need it to be. So, I'm speeding, and I'm checking, and I'm looking, and I'm thinking, how do they do it all? I thought anthills were a bad omen but here we are running up and down them if only to achieve a proper home with a proper fireplace. But as the ambulance takes a soft right on to the highway on-ramp the streetlights blink, stutter, and I'm aware that there's no more light left to collect.”

**Tyler
Ramos**

**Every Sunday after church
my grandma used to play
John Coltrane
once she was home
and had removed her steam-pressed
blouse and her silk head scarf,
which was lilac and made her look
like a small flower next to the broad
shoulders of my grandpa’s brown cotton
coat, and she called that song her prayer
song because even after the sweat
of a preacher had anointed
her and the rest of the front pew,
she would kneel down before
her plastic-covered sofa
and whisper in Spanish to her mother
and her mother’s mother, while Coltrane
played with tender resolve
from the tiny kitchen speaker,
but this did not last long as she often
made her way on to the sofa and fell asleep
to the sounds the wind makes in a field
after a storm, until my grandpa
would kiss her awake and she’d blossom
into the next half of her Sunday
with the quiet joy of a person who has held
that which they loved most.**

**Maybe this is why my grandpa still weeps
in the places she used to sleep,
why he closes the blinds after it rains,
because his lips can mold the air
where he would kiss her awake,
and even I still ache
on cloudy days when the wind is cool
and wet and fresh with the perfume
of those small purple flowers
growing outside my grandpa’s home,
and there isn’t much to say
when I walk into the kitchen
and he’s playing Coltrane
trying to remember how it feels
to press his lips against the freckled skin
of my grandma’s forehead,
but I place my hand on his hard shoulder and
say:
she’s not far,
it’s okay.
And the tiny kitchen speaker whispers
it’s okay,
that the rain is gone.**

“sneakers on the telephone wire”

Sydney Severn

**Underneath the hanging monstera plant
I rest my elbows on the dusty windowsill,
my hair floats above me with the fresh air of raindrops
harmonizing in the alleyway.**

**This is not the kind of alley from an old film, but
where bumpers are blown off and windows are broken,
perhaps for a phone charger or sample of cheap perfume.
Where I see conflicted people wander, as if the drug they chose
blinds them. They sing haunted lullabies
staggering around potholes
and beneath a telephone wire that is adorned with old sneakers
hanging by their strings;
as if to tie a satin ribbon around the scene below,
and place it under a tree.**

**I retreat to my bed, in a crevice between prearranged pillows,
as intoxicated students are entertained
in backyards across the alley.**

Where everything is so loud –

**I often wish I could join them,
rather than waiting for the music to stop.**

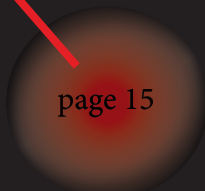
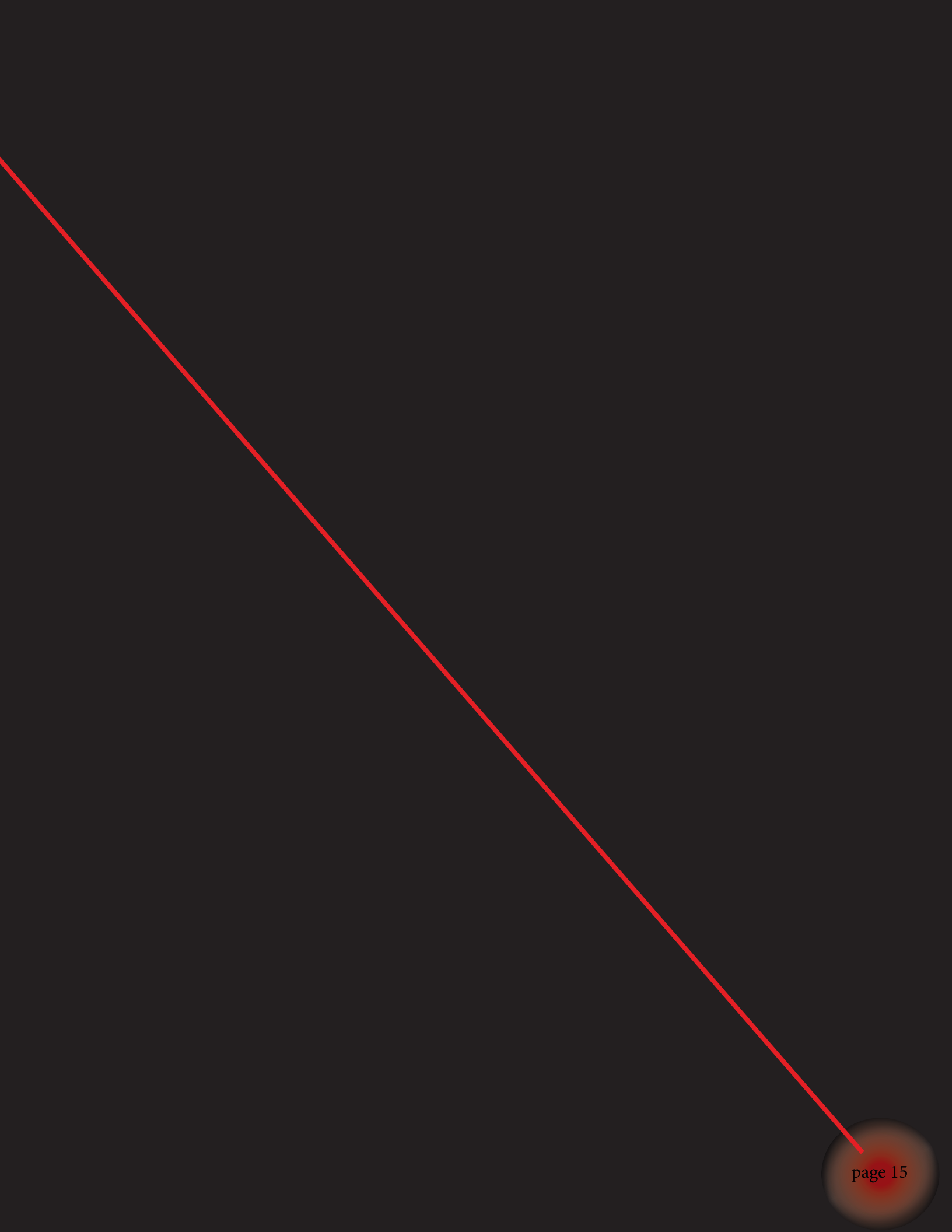
**Tears begin to blur my vision, but do not fall to my lap –
this creates a pond of watercolors
spider-webbing between the frame of my window.
I see my reflection dance with the rest of them,**

“sneakers on the telephone wire”

Sydney Severn

**in their colors across the alley,
jumping to a remix of old songs
and drinking something
that’s been handed to me.**

**I focus again
and the colors wash away,
to drown in the rain with the rest of us.**



“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

The music hit us first, and then the smoke, but it wasn't like anyone in Friday Harbor was surprised. The woman in the high window had never known what she had until it was gone. Of course she'd do it at one in the morning, when only fishermen and wine-drunk teenagers were watching. It's much easier to do something stupid in darkness.

Matteo and I were sitting on my favorite dock when it happened, the one that's only three down from the marina, watching the boat lights stretch long on the water. It was a warm night; one where the air smells like summer and the world turns slow, one where other people seem extra magnetic and beautiful in the moonlight.

“We might have to leave,” Matteo said. I glanced at him, leaning back on his hands in his worn-out cotton t-shirt and jeans. His was the kind of beauty that was always just on the edge of burning, lit from the inside. He always had too much fire for me. He took a sip from the bottle of white wine and passed it to me.

I took it and shrugged. “I guess it is

getting kinda late. You wanna go now?”

Matteo shook his head very slightly, staring out at the horizon. The point where the water ended and the sky began was delineated only by the shelf of stars dotting the blackness. “No, I don't mean like that,” he said. “I mean we might have to move. Like, my family.”

I put the bottle down on the boards between us. “What? Move where? Why?”

The line of his shoulders was relaxed but his eyes were unhappy, the light of the marina reflecting gold in them. A brown curl fell over his forehead, and he didn't push it back. I watched his Adam's apple bob and catch as he swallowed.

“You don't have to tell me,” I said, trying to pull back. We'd gotten to this point before, and I knew he kept things from me.

There are some secrets that no friendship is worth.

“I don't remember Tijuana,” he said, taking a sip from

“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

the bottle. “My mom still says ‘home’ when she talks about it. It makes me feel guilty.”

I leaned back on my hands too, looking up at the sky. We graduated from high school today and Matteo’s mom had hugged me so tight afterward that I couldn’t breathe. Mom had hugged me too, but when Mrs. Mendoza wrapped me up, I squeezed my eyes shut and imagined for just a moment that Matteo’s big family was there for just me. I immediately regretted the thought—it would kill Mom if she knew—but I couldn’t take it back. I guess Matteo wasn’t the only one who felt guilty sometimes.

“Try not to feel guilty,” I said. “She loves so big, you know?”

Matteo nodded. “I do too. That’s the problem.”

Affection flooded through my chest. I inhaled sharply and forced myself to stare at the sky. *Don’t look at him, Maya. It’ll only make it worse.* This ache was familiar, and easier to feel than when I first figured it out, but sometimes...sometimes it just hit me out of nowhere.

“Will you guys move back?” I asked once

my heart calmed down. “To Tijuana?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “Maybe. I heard my parents talking about it in the kitchen a couple nights ago.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault, Maya.”

“I know, but I’m still sorry.”

We were silent for a while, swinging our feet over the edge of the dock and listening to the waves. The world was quiet tonight and I felt for a moment that nothing else existed except this space in time.

Then, the sound of the waves changed. A soft melody was falling through the rhythmic crash and hush of the tide. I turned to look behind us at the rows of businesses lining the bayfront, searching for the source of the music. They were all smashed up against one another, side-by-side and painted bright colors for the tourists. Most of them were closed, their windows shuttered against the possibility of rain, but not The Waterfront Inn. The building looked empty, but one of the windows on the uppermost floor was open. A lamp inside glowed yellow and the edge of a white curtain bil-

“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

It was Ilsa I realized, the innkeeper. She usually played on Friday nights, but it had gotten so late that I assumed she wasn't going to play tonight. Very few of us had ever met her but I once heard Matteo's mom say that there was something strange and almost tragic about her, a sort of moneyed emptiness in her eyes. When I was little, the kids on my street talked about her like she was some sort of ghost: “the woman in the high window.” My mom told me that Ilsa had just shown up at some point before I was born. Apparently, she got off the ferry one day and bought the Inn with cash the next. Most of us just knew her by her nighttime music now. It was the reason Matteo and I started coming here on Friday nights.

She was playing “Clair de Lune” tonight. I leaned back on the boards of the dock and stared up at the sky, trying not to feel anything. If I let the music get to me, I would feel everything I didn't want to: my fingers aching to hold Matteo's, the loneliness I shoved down when I had to eat microwave meals alone, and the paralyzing fear that ICE agents could bang down Matteo's door one day.

Just because he'd never told me didn't

mean I didn't know.

His dad was still moving boxes into their garage the day I met Matteo. At thirteen, I was taller than he was, but he was braver. Even then, he was the boy who studied until his hand cramped, the boy who picked up double shifts at the diner on weekends, and the boy who got tipsy under the stars with homebodies like me. I always felt like he lived on the edge of something I couldn't see.

“You guys are new, right?” I asked when I ran into him at the mailbox.

“Yeah, we just moved here from—” He coughed, looking unsure. “From Mexico.”

“Oh, cool.” I smiled and opened my mailbox. “I'm Maya. I live there.” I motioned to the house a little down the street. It was small, painted pale yellow, and seemed to lean a little too far to the left. Its only good features were its sloping front porch and purple front door, which made the house look like it was wearing a crooked grin.

“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

Matteo smiled back, his grin a little crooked too, and opened his mailbox.

“I’m Matteo. I live there,” he said, motioning to his new house, the robin’s-egg-blue one with the tangerine front door. His was a little bigger than ours and it seemed to squat protectively over the yard.

“You wanna come over?” he said. “We’re sliding down the stairs in empty moving boxes.” The crooked grin returned, and his eyes sparked in the sun.

Maybe his fire *had* caught by then.

After that, Mrs. Mendoza invited me over for dinner most nights since my mom worked late at the hospital. “Call me Mari-sol,” she said, but I never did. Matteo was the oldest and his family was loud and warm and everything I’d ever wanted. His little sisters and I played dress-up when Matteo didn’t want to babysit alone, and the Fourth of July smelled like sparklers and s’mores in their backyard. When I got my first job as a lifeguard, Matteo’s *abuela*, who I didn’t see that often, brought over a plate of *conchas*, saying, “You’re a working woman now!” Mrs. Mendoza planted sunflowers, marigolds, and dahlias the summer after that. One time, Matteo and I fell asleep in

the garden after we spent hours pulling weeds for her.

Lying there on the dock, I pictured a new family ripping out her flowers and replacing them with an overwatered, grossly manicured lawn. I had to grit my teeth to resist yanking Matteo into a hug right there and not letting him go.

There had always been hints. We waited at the bus stop together every morning and did our homework on my front porch every afternoon, and I started to notice that he kept his head down at school for reasons other than what I thought was a strange shyness.

The same day I figured it out was the same day I realized I was in love with him. It was spring of our sophomore year, and we stayed up late writing our English papers. I’d finished mine and was sitting on the porch, watching moths flit around one of the streetlights, when I glanced at Matteo. He was slumped over his open copy of *Romeo and Juliet* with his cheek pressed against one of the pages. His dark eyebrows were relaxed, and his eyelashes fluttered ever so slightly each time he exhaled.

“Claire de Lune”

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“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

I stared at him, feeling like someone had flipped a switch and doused me in light.

I breathed in, then out, slowly because I wanted to freeze that moment in time. I sat there in the streetlight, listening to the crickets, and feeling *everything* for him. That familiar ache.

Then, a hum started in the distance, and I glanced up. A police car, flashing black and white like a killer whale was purring slowly down the narrow street. What was that doing here?

I looked around and my eyes caught on Matteo's house not twenty feet across from us. There, in the window, Matteo's grandmother looked out. Her face was the picture of terror, a ghost in blackness. We stared right into each other's eyes, and I felt myself gripped by cold fear. Very slowly, she pulled the lace curtains across the window.

I held my breath and sat very still until the car turned around in the cul-de-sac and turned off our street.

Once it was out of sight, I whispered:

“Two households, both alike in dignity,

In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,

From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,

Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.”

And then, glancing at Matteo's sleeping face,

“A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life.”

The next day at the bus stop, Matteo asked me why I was so quiet. Was I worried I'd get a bad grade on my paper? I shook my head and looked everywhere but his deep, brown eyes.

Amber Lane asked him to the winter dance in sixth period that same day and they've been dating ever since.

Now, on the dock, I pushed myself up onto my elbows and shook off my thoughts. We were eighteen and tipsy on a Friday night in a beautiful place. We were supposed to be having fun.

“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

“You should come down to the Beach club tomorrow,” I said, elbowing him. “I’m not guarding so we’ll actually be able to hang out. You think you can beat my record on the log-roll?”

Matteo snorted. “No one can beat your record on the log-roll.”

“Yeah, I know.” I laughed. “That’s why I’m asking you. I’m hoping to gloat later.” He punched my arm. “You’re gonna get a big head.”

“It’s too late for that.”

He laughed. “It’s definitely too late.”

We let the conversation fall out then, still listening to “Claire de Lune” floating over us. The innkeeper was playing it over and over again tonight.

“Are you and Amber doing anything to celebrate graduation?” I asked after a while. I’d realized it was just easier to like Amber. She was sweet and she never interrupted when someone else was talking.

Matteo cut his eyes away. “We actually decided to break it off.”

I whipped my head around to look at him. “What? When?”

“Last Thursday. I was waiting to tell you until I figured out how I felt about it.”

“Oh.” There was a beat of quiet. “How do you feel about it?”

He looked at me, laughing on an exhale. “Relieved, actually.”

Something flooded through my chest, like someone had opened a window. “Well, that’s good,” I said carefully.

He smiled at his lap. “Yeah, it’s good. It wasn’t really right for either of us.”

“Okay well, if you feel good, then... well, that’s good.”

Matteo looked at me again and snorted. “Well said.”

“I don’t know what to say!” I laughed. “You guys broke up and you’re not upset. That’s good.”

Matteo nodded, smiling. “I’m not upset.”

“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

“Good.”

“Good.”

There was a comfortable pause. Then another.

“Do you think we’ll keep doing this?” he asked.

“Coming here on Friday nights?”

“Yeah.”

As long as you don’t have to leave.

“I think we will,” I said, trying to sound cheerful. I picked up the half-empty wine bottle. “We have a few more of these to get through. My mom’ll never drink them.”

Matteo laughed a little. “Yeah, I hope so...” he breathed, trailing off.

“We will,” I said, trying to sound sure.

“We will.”

We were quiet again, still listening to Ilse play.

“She’s playing the same song over and over,” Matteo whispered.

“I know. She usually plays more than one.”

“Yeah.”

I suddenly realized how close his face was to mine. I could have counted his freckles if I were brave enough to look at him long enough.

“Happy graduation, girl next door,” he said, leaning the side of his head against mine and staring out at the horizon.

“Happy graduation, boy next door,” I said back, sensing something had changed but not quite sure what it was.

We sat there for a long time, the music laying over us like a veil.

“My *abuela* might be deported,” he whispered, so low I almost couldn’t hear it.

My stomach sank down, down, down. I turned my whole body toward him then, fighting with everything I had not to grab his hand.

“She had a stroke and when we called an ambulance they asked for her papers. We don’t know for sure yet, but if she is deported...” He looked away, choking on the word. “If she is, we might go with her. My mom doesn’t know if she can be away from her.”

“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

Fuck it, I thought. I took Matteo’s hand and squeezed hard.

He turned his gaze to me, finally, and the look in his eyes sent ice-cold fear rushing through me. Fear for his *abuela*, for his brothers and sisters, that his future might be ripped away from him just when it was starting to feel possible. He’d already gotten into college. Everything he was right on the edge of was here. What would it feel like to lose that?

The horizon, the dock, the marina, and the boat lights tilted until we were sliding off the dock, sliding off the earth, and holding onto each other because suddenly there was nothing else to hold onto.

I kept looking in his eyes and looking in eyes and looking in eyes.

He was looking back into mine and we drifted toward one another like magnets lost in everything else but this.

And that was when Matteo Mendoza, the boy on fire, kissed me.

I inhaled sharply. I never thought...I mean,

he’d been with Amber. I assumed that the ache in my chest was all it ever would be, an ache...

The day I figured it out was the day I realized I was in love with him.

I lifted my hand to his jaw and kissed him right back.

His mouth was soft and a golden drop of something like joy, despite everything, rippled in my chest.

Don’t leave, don’t leave, don’t leave, I thought.

Kissing Matteo was like wading through tidal waves, only warmer and kinder, a comforting crush and pull in the here and now. Debussy roared in my ears.

When we broke away, we were breathing like two people who’d never tasted oxygen in their lives.

Matteo grinned slightly, bittersweet. “Finally,” he said.

“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

Then the sound of piano keys crashing together, like someone had pressed them all at once, cut dissonantly through the night. I pulled away sharply and turned to look at the Inn. The piano had been abandoned and Ilsa's shadow was tripping in and out of sight as she made her way down the creaky staircase to the bottom floor. I'd been in there once with my mom and I knew that she was probably in the kitchen, by the lobby. She must have turned on every light inside because all the windows were glowing golden in the night.

“What's she doing?” I asked, not liking the careless way she was rummaging through the cupboard under the sink.

“I don't know,” Matteo said, and I could tell by his voice that the hairs on the back of his neck were standing up too.

I put my hand on his arm just as Ilsa struck a match and lit the kitchen curtains on fire, all in one beautiful, fluid motion.

“Oh my god,” Matteo and I said at the same time.

The curtains caught fast, and she moved away as if the flames had blown her back, her face illuminated in orange light.

For a moment she stood transfixed and exhilarated by the tragedy of her own design. Gleeful, she rushed to the door that led to the back alley, but when she pushed, the door didn't open. She stared at the handle, then jiggled it. It didn't budge. Soon she was throwing her whole weight against it, her movements frantic and panicked like a trapped animal.

Matteo and I whirled to face one another the second we realized what was happening.

“You get the front door. I'll get the back,” he said.

We were halfway down the dock when we heard a crash. Ilsa had knocked over the row of pots and pans that hung above the kitchen counter and was now running back up the stairs, two at a time. I grabbed Matteo's arm and pulled him back, pointing as she careened past the open windows on the upper floor. The smell of smoke and kerosene hit us in an awful, thick, suffocating wave.

I covered my nose and mouth with my shirt, coughing. The flames were licking up the base of the building.

“Claire de Lune”

Sophia Freeman

“We have to call 911,” I said, pulling out my phone.

I was fumbling with it when Matteo’s hand touched mine. “Wait,” he said, his scared eyes flitting back and forth between mine. I stared back at him, realizing.

Then, his dark eyes changed, deciding.

“Call them, Maya,” he said firmly. “I’ll leave before they get here.”

“Okay.”

I tried to breathe evenly as I recited our location to the smooth-voiced operator, my eyes tracking Isla’s silhouette. Matteo and I watched, paralyzed, as she darted from room to room, looking for a way out. When she didn’t find one, she burst through a set of French doors, rushing out onto the highest balcony. The curtains I’d seen billowing in the piano room were now alight.

No amount of insurance money is worth this.

In a panic, she dashed to the edge and

glanced at the water below. My stomach clenched—it was three stories up. For a moment she flitted back and forth like a caged bird, still silhouetted against the golden-orange light dancing behind her. Then she stopped, standing frozen above us.

And before I knew what was happening, the woman in the high window had pitched herself over the edge and was falling through the night.

The sirens sounded down the street just as I was kicking off my flip-flops.

“Go,” Matteo and I said at the same time.

We held each other’s gaze for a split second and then he was gone.

I heard the splash next. I could still hear “Clair de Lune” echoing in my ears as I dove into the water.

When they asked me what happened I said I was alone.

U nbound

journal

2 0 2 2

*“Birthday”*T

How does the morning taste
as it breaks over your tongue?

Drag half-asleep, new-aged feet
down the hall; stop short at the
creamy underbelly
of the soap in its dish.

Let a stream of water colder
than the past year, now over,
spring from ancient tap to
flow across young skin.

aylor Ginieczki

However much you want it to,
the fluid curtain that partitions
you
from the
painted glass
does not extend to self-reflection,
nor to hope and fear
as two sides of one mirror.

January is only as real as you'd like.



“Wanderers” Will Chilton

“Dementia” Brynn Lemons

Down the stairs and around the corner,
Is Don's room of rocks. A skinny little alcove
Of cool cement and foggy, insulated foam walls,
Of pine shelves and a steel table
where glass eyes warp, like teardrops of water,
Minerals and treasures and pebbles.
Don's fanged tiger's eye, a triangular tooth
Flashing orange, brown, yellow besides
the pink rose quartz and the mustard jasper.
Slate and shale; halite and biotite. Don's room
of tiny things, hidden in the tiny closet
beneath the basement stairs; hard shoulders
hunched over tiny work with square fingers.
Caught creation between thumb
and nail: a wedding ring, a locket,
an unfinished pendant, polished, promised
to a daughter's daughter and left without a clasp,
left in Don's tiny room of rocks

“Dementia” Brynn Lemons

after he forgets the movements, the process
of the muscles, and the mechanisms
of the mind, lost in the junction between now
and gone. Memories haunt him like Sodom,
shadowed over Lot's wife, told to flee:
do not look back. Memories ghost him like
soft-footed Eurydice down Hell's tunnel,
sighing Orpheus, told: do not look back.
Memories turned soggy, smell of formaldehyde,
and clump into drowned photographs until
Don's room of rocks are packed away
into another basement, sold to collectors
or grifted off in yard sales, but only until
Don's daughter decides to pull the wet cardboard
from her half-done basement, insulated foam walls,
and uncovers tiny tumbled gifts. Only until
she leaves the rock room, and doesn't look back.

“moments of an afternoon”

Sydney Severn

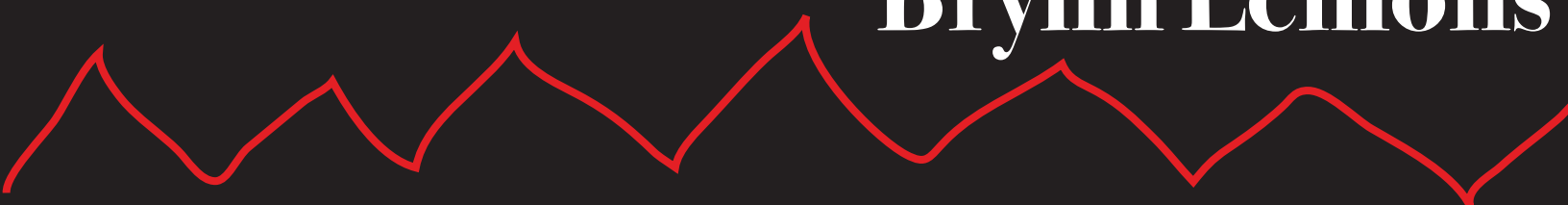
**I follow my feet
on their way to the front of the restaurant,
my white fingertips squeezing the car key
just in case.
But I find myself distracted by glassy puddles
that create a pathway of negative space
upon which I step:
an accumulation of afternoon rain
in their breakable rings,
that my torn tennis shoes fracture.
Gathered, and cyclical,
and mirrored: like stepping through a glass table
where shards splash between your ankles or up to your knees,
and a dimension has been punctured.
My grip loosens.**

**With each step my mind whispers to my body
slow down, and take it in
like my Mother does when the sun sets.
To flirt with the sentiments of the Earth –
the beauty of the mundane –
and stop to photograph her.**

**I continue beside the cool brick wall, carefully stepping between dry spots,
still showered in a brief downpour.**

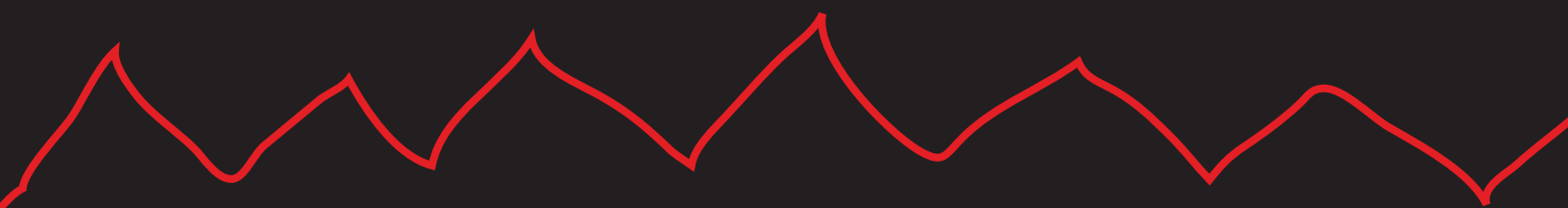
**I cannot stop myself from admiring
how each concentric circle is created, and creates another,
then becomes something much bigger;
until I reach the front door and close it behind me.**

“W Progress Ave” Brynn Lemons



I dream of you in ways
I can't put down in words
Without losing a detail of your
Bubble gum smile,
Egg yolk hair,
Chilled feet
Pressed to my calves,
Under childhood covers,
Heads on the same pillow—
I did not dream of you then.
Though now,
It is all blinking nostalgia,
Bird soft out of crawl spaces,
Wings caught in the chipped panels
Of my thoughts, asking,

Again asking, do I remember
The August sweet heat chasing
Lost dogs down hills?
The aquamarine tinge
Of neighborhood pools?
The crooning morning from
The windows of your bedroom
Where I slept, unknowing and
lovely,
Beside your gentle body,
Not thinking of how the summers
Turn over into years of forgetting.
Until I catch your laugh
In the shadows of my dreaming
And remember everything.



“Dark Fear” Elizabeth Wilkinson

I always walked nights alone. The dark never used to scare me. Before, I practically lived in the dark. My days always started early. I had to be at the factory at 6am. Mornings had to be quick and efficient, but I'd never leave without kissing my cat, Pepper, on the head. I'd narrowly miss her daily swats after the smooch as I headed out the door, greeted by the morning stars.

Breaks were minimal at my job, so little of my time was spent outside in the sun. My station was downstairs in the basement, furiously sewing away under fluorescent lights that kept my flesh pale. By the time I got done at work, I left the factory just as I had entered it hours before: in the dark.

I got home that night and sat down to the usual small dinner with Pepper warming my lap. I washed up, ironed my clothes, and took a bath. After I turned off the light to sleep, my skin began to itch as if someone was staring at me, but

when I opened my eyes all I could see was darkness. It was pitch black in my room with the curtains closed. I only had one window, and it was facing a building. Without the blackout curtains, the wall in which my window faced would be lightly bathed in orange by the street-light in the alley below. I sat up slowly, blindly reaching for the orange sliver of the window from my bed. When I pulled the curtains back, all I could see was the wall. The only thing that caught my eye was the dew that twinkled on the fire escape. I was tired, which was more of a reason to go back to sleep. I would have if I hadn't seen the figure in the corner of my room.

The window's slight glow shed just enough light to capture the foreign body. It was large and reached all the way up to the ceiling. My eyes followed the huge shape. The room looked minuscule in comparison. It could have been the trick of the dim light, but I would have seen my dresser behind it. It was

dark except for the slab of white on the end of the neck. That must have been its face. I didn't see details because I panicked and pulled hard on my lamp string. The light was blinding, but I refused to take my eyes away from the corner that now lay empty.

I first thought that it was just a sick dream, or exhaustion-fueled hallucinations, but that morning when I was getting ready for work, I saw it again. I had left my lamp on that night to sleep, but I hardly got a wink. I crawled out of bed, early as per usual. Twilight still hung outside when I opened my bedroom door. Light flooded into the dark hallway, and I saw the end was blocked. A large, dark mass sat at the edge of the light. Its bulky, shapeless body fills the space to the brim. This time I got a better look at it. As we both stared at each other, I saw its eyes were dark and hollow, carved. It had small, jagged teeth lining the bottom of its mask-like face. Jet black fingers as long as my arms were

tucked neatly by its belly, exposed by their sharpness.

I flicked on the hallway light, and in a blink, the thing was gone. I stood there for a moment, shivering, and doused in sweat. Pepper's demanding yowls for her breakfast jolted me from stillness. I shakily made my way to the kitchen and quickly turned on the light. Pepper lay lazily over the coffee table in the living room, stretched out like a furry snake. She didn't seem to notice what I had witnessed. Maybe this was all in my head. Her kibble tinkled blaringly in my ears as I poured, but I didn't have the stomach to eat, myself. I got ready for work early that day and decided to head out. I remember how dark it was that morning. The moon was just a sliver, and the beastly thing looked big at the bottom of my stairs. For the first time, I was late for work.

“Dark Fear” Elizabeth Wilkinson

The visits had been happening for a few days. Once the sun began to dip and before the light touched the horizon, the thing was back. I figured out that the beast, what I had begun to call it, only showed up when the sun wasn't out. But that didn't mean it wouldn't show up even if you had a light on. I learned that on my walks home from work. It seemed to jump from deep alleys and shadowy patches despite my best efforts to follow every streetlamp on my way home. Thank God I had a small light on the balcony of my house. It usually sat feet away from me as I tried to open my door bathed in yellow. I hated how it stared. I tried to ignore it sitting outside my window while I tried to eat dinner in peace. It was always there in the dark. It didn't do anything, but I still couldn't get any sleep. Even without rest, work still had to be done.

I was stumbling through the kitchen on a cold December morning. My bag slipping off my shoulder and only every other button fastened on my shirt. I was nearly half asleep as I made my way to the door, struggling to pull on my heels. I leaned over to kiss Pepper while reach-

ing for the door.

“Ouch!” I gasped at the streak of pain across my cheek. I bolted upwards, holding my hand to the stripe oozing crimson beads. “Pepper... man I'm off my game.” I mumbled, watching as Pepper rolled on her back on the couch, looking quite proud she finally nailed me after years of unsolicited morning kisses. Wiping my bloody cheek with my sleeve, I pulled open the door. At least that scratch woke me up a bit.

The day at the factory was otherwise normal. My fingers were sore from sewing all day and my back ached from spending hours crunched in a stooped position. My eyes strained from the fluorescent lights, so when I entered the darkness, they burned. That walk home was rather lonely, as I did not see the shadowy figure of my nightly companion. I didn't see the beast when I walked up to my stairs. Its usual routine was to wait for me on the balcony. I couldn't help but look around as I ascended the steps, carefully fishing out my keys when I got to the door. The creak of the old metal locks sounded louder that night

as I turned the key. I set my bag down on the couch with a sigh, flicking on the lights.

“Pepper-” The word caught in my throat as I saw something small and long in the entryway. I kneeled to pick up the limp, gray and furry stump. Strings of red broke and fell to the floor as I lifted it, slumping vertebrae by vertebrae over my hand.

“..... No.... no no no no...” I realized I hadn’t turned on the hall light, and I instantly looked into the dark. The beast stood there. I heard a faint dripping sound. Droplets lead up to the spiny feet of the beast from where the bloody stump first lay. My blood ran cold as my mouth gaped in horror. I fell to the floor and kicked myself back against the door, a voiceless wail contorting my face as I held all that I had left of Pepper, her tail.

I ended up losing my factory job after Pepper. I couldn’t get up early anymore or leave late because the dark was the beast’s time. Sleeping was a permanent issue after the incident, and now my house is fully lit twenty-four seven. I made sure to never get close to it again

after Pepper. I bought extra lamps and they filled every nook and cranny of my bedroom. No shadow could survive as the lamps blazed like a desert sun all night long. I didn’t need heating in my room anymore, which was perfect since my electric bill was through the roof. It hadn’t gone away, and I didn’t think it was leaving anytime soon.

It was hard to get a job around here. I hadn’t turned my nose up at anything, but the jobs didn’t last long. It was a constant trickle of side stuff where some leaned over the edge of losing my dignity, but I hadn’t gone that far yet. I tipped the line, that’s for sure, but it balanced between accepting a grab or sleeping on a park bench. I realized the things I had to do in order to keep a roof over my head. Having the beast around didn’t seem so bad when the landlord came by to be paid. The beast had destroyed my life, but at least I was still alive. I also lost contact with my family, though that was way before the beast, and the few friends I had were now wisps in my imagination. I hadn’t laughed in so long, my lungs felt weak from their sedentary lifestyle.

“Dark Fear” Elizabeth Wilkinson

Calls from home rattled empty through my apartment once in a while.

“Honey. Mae, are you alright? I haven’t heard from you in weeks. Why haven’t you called me on Saturdays?”

“Sorry, Ma. Things have been... busy at work.”

“Busy? Things have always been busy, Mae. What’s really going on?”

“I’ve just got some extra things I have to do at the factory now. I’m slowly climbing up the ladder, Ma. Be happy for me.”

I could almost hear her pinched brow and pursed lips at this point. Ma always knew when I was lying. I’d never been good at talking about problems. Living in a family of six, I learned how to hold my own. Plus, my family has never been too keen on the whole ‘mental’ stuff. It showed weakness, and when you have three other siblings, you learn how to hide it well. In these times, showing weakness is dangerous. Coming up with an illness in the head was like a death sentence. I didn’t want to end up in a worse place. I liked my home, and I

could picture what an ‘asylum’ looked like just by the name. I didn’t want to go there. I was not crazy. At least, I didn’t think so. I just needed help.

I ended up contacting a local father and visited his church. It was chilly when I entered. I noticed how the outside air felt warmer as I passed over the threshold. Funny, since we were in the middle of winter. The large hall held no people, until I saw someone stooped by a row of candles at the front.

“Hello father.” My voice echoed, swallowed up by the vast, looming space. A younger man than I was expecting responded to my call. He was lighting a few candles when I came in and turned with a match in hand.

“Ah, Mae. We spoke on the phone, yes?” I nodded as I neared, my attention directed to the high ceilings.

“You’re in quite the pickle. Come, let’s sit.” He waved the match dark and moved towards one of the ancient pews, smiling warmly as he sat and motioned for me to do the same. I did so, clutching my purse on my lap. I could hardly look at him and stared at the flickering can-

dles instead. Quiet fell between us and I noticed how frigid the floor felt beneath my feet, how clammy my hands were and how stiff the pews were underneath my bones.

“I’ve been having problems with... the supernatural, I think.” I managed to stammer. The moments of silence were uncomfortable, but it was magnified by the stare of the crucified Christ hanging above.

“Yes, yes, that’s what you told me on the phone. Can you describe to me, what it is you’ve seen, heard, felt?”

“It’s large... and pitch black. With a face as white as porcelain. It’s got these... long, sharp fingers. It’s like staring into nothing. It’s the darkest dark, a hole with no light. It’s like staring into a well and there’s nothing. You can’t see anything.” I stopped myself short and stared at my knees. I haven’t spoken like this to anyone recently, it was hard to stop. I glanced up to see the young father’s expression grow pinched. I could tell he was becoming concerned.

“Has it spoken to you?”

“No, no it just stares. It follows me anytime it’s dark, that’s when it comes out you see. It never comes out during the day or when all the lights are on in my house. That’s how I’ve avoided it for so long. It doesn’t show up when there’s light.” I could hear the father sigh and the pew creak as he leaned back. He stroked a tan thumb across his chin calmly, but he was growing rather pale. “And has it done anything?”

My throat clenched into a vice, the memory of that cold stump forming in my palm. I sucked in a sharp breath, which made the priest almost jump. “It.... it ate my cat.”

“What?”

“It... my cat. That thing... That beast i-it ate my cat one night. I don’t know why... but there was blood and... and her tail...”

The Father clapped a hand over his mouth and stood quickly. “I’m sorry miss, but we can’t help you.”

“Dark Fear” Elizabeth Wilkinson

“What? No... No, you have to help me. You’re the... You do exorcisms, right?” I asked, scooting towards him in desperation but he turned and briskly began to walk away. Any crumb of hope I had was fading at every step he took.

“You need to leave,” he said.

“N-no. No, I’m not leaving. You were supposed to help me. You said you were going to help me.” I stood clutching my bag; I couldn’t give up yet. I could feel my molars grind, my jaw clenched to stifle my anxiety. I followed, the candle flames flickering as we sped past them. “Father, please! Can’t you just... get some holy water to throw at it or... or something.”

The priest suddenly whipped around.

“No! No... I’m sorry, Mae, but I can do anything to help you. Satan himself has sent a henchman to retrieve you. You... You are too far gone. You are already in his grasp. Satan will be here to get you

himself and I cannot afford this church’s safety. God... God cannot save you now.”

I could see his terror mirrored in my own eyes. I quickly shut my mouth. It was over. I remember how long it felt, walking back to those church doors. The stained-glass shadows were long on the floor, sunset was coming.

I had a plan. I knew how to avoid the demonic beast, but I hadn’t figured out how to get rid of it. I thought with my research, I’d have come across something by now, but not even the church could help me. Surviving had been tough; the most imminent danger being paying the rent.

Finally, around the third week of all this I landed a temp job at an office. It was a small business, so the hours fit neatly between dawn and dusk. Unlike the factory, I was the only woman, and I didn’t do as much, but sometimes I still preferred that old, cramped basement. Now I had my own desk at the front, com-

pletely exposed to anyone who walked in, and I had to attack them with that customer service chime.

“Good morning! Who are you here for? Can I get you anything? Have a seat and I’ll get you something to drink.” I did my very best, but some people were put off by how sunken my eyes were, my first write up at the job. They were vain there, but it was decent pay and had the hours that I needed.

I went home quickly every day while everyone else gathered to scurry down to the bars like roaches. At first, no one invited me, just glanced in my direction before they would shuffle down the stairs cackling to one another. I noticed a taller gentleman’s lingering gaze as he made the rounds to invite people. He was a young hotshot just getting his foot in the door, and I think his dad owned the place. I didn’t care enough to find out, but it was obvious the way he strutted around with the lingering stench of cologne. I noticed that he liked to stand

in front of my desk, talking to people. After a while, he started to check up on me.

“How are the eyes? They look better,” he said one day. Without looking up from my papers, I replied, “Concealer and powder do amazing things, thanks.”

The guy started inviting me out to the bars despite everyone’s reluctance. I always refused. At first, he’d been compliant enough to accept this, but that changed. One day, when I was packing up after work, he said, “All that is going to waste if you don’t have a little fun.” I didn’t like the tone of his voice. I continued to gather my things and hurriedly pulled on my coat. Being ignored was not favored by this man. He made sure to storm off with a huff as he viciously pulled on his jacket. After he left, I saw his nails had left marks on my desk.

“Dark Fear” Elizabeth Wilkinson

Weeks started to go by, and workdays blurred together. The scurrying home felt normal, the man’s dagger eyes in my back became numb, and I felt I could keep this up. When winter came, it made things a lot more difficult. My hours started to skirt the dark. I hurried home one night, watching the darkness bleed into the horizon. My hands had a slight tremble as I fished out my keys at my door, feeling that crawl of sick anticipation.

“Hey, sure is taking you a long time to get in there.” The guy from work was standing at the bottom of my stairs. My shaking stopped as I froze.

“What are you doing here?” I felt like I had to squeeze the words from my throat. I could hardly hear over the pounding in my ears. The guy slowly made his way up the stairs. My hand touched the cold key in my bag, and I quickly shoved it into the lock. My clammy hand slipped on the doorknob, but I rushed through, flicking on the lights, and shutting the door behind me. I didn’t hear the click of the door.

“Hun, that was rude.” He shoved a foot in and was slowly pushing himself

into the hall. I clutched my purse with white knuckles as he casually came inside. The lights in the house burned my eyes. They were dry from staring.

“Get out.” My warning was barely a hiss.

“Doesn’t seem like you’re busy. Can’t I entertain you?” He smiled wryly, a hand brushing the wall as he closed the distance. I could feel the hairs rising on my arms, prickle the inside of my sleeves.

“No, no you don’t understand.” My eyes wildly darted around. All the lights were on. We were both safe, at least from one horror. Cold sweat beaded at my brow as I felt the jitters of adrenaline. My room was the only other room with a lock. It also had a fire escape. Kicking my shoes free, I bolted to my door. I could hear my moves matched. Panic made me crash through. I fumbled with the light switch as I hastily slammed the door closed.

“You’re quick!” He got an arm through this time, and the door slipped from my fingers with his shove. I tripped and fell backwards as the door flew open. Pain zipped up my spine as I hit the floor.

*CW: Sexual assault

He loomed in the doorway with a grin, a hand raised to the switch. My cry followed the darkness, the light slammed shut as he kicked the door behind him. Jolts of terror moved through me, and I flipped myself over to crawl to the window. I felt a grip on my ankle.

“No, please,” I sobbed. “Please turn on the light, you don’t understand. W-We’re in danger!”

“You scared of the dark? Don’t worry, I’ll keep you company.”

I slid back limply across the floor until I was underneath him and he flipped me over. I could see a sliver of light from underneath the door, a line of hope. All of that was lost when my eyes closed at the touch of his hand. His thumb passed over the slickness of my cheeks and pressed hard to run over the ridges of my teeth.

“I’ve tried hard to be patient.” His growl rumbled in his chest.

Anticipation of what was next spread numbness through my skin. The darkness was deafening. It consumed us both. What I could feel was how my sobs shook

our bodies and how his body grew heavier on top of mine, how the buttons of his shirt poked my cold skin.

Were buttons supposed to feel sharp? I couldn’t feel his hot breath against my throat anymore, but I could feel his head resting next to mine. Warmth pooled over my belly, and it seeped down my sides. The room was dark when I opened my eyes, but I wasn’t facing the vast darkness. A slick, white face hovered inches from mine. I could even hear a soft wheezing, like someone breathing behind a mask. I stared into the carved, hollow eyes of the beast. I slowly looked down over the man’s shoulder on top of me to see the beast’s long, blade-like talons sunk into his back. The sharp ends lay gently on my belly, if I breathed deeply, I would have been pierced.

I felt the corpse of my old attacker peeled away, blood stretching in ribbons between us. I lay there stunned and unable to move as I watched black, slimy arms hold tightly to the body. They pulled the limp corpse into a large slit across the beast’s belly. I stared as the body was absorbed into the void. I shivered from the cooling blood I was now

“Dark Fear” Elizabeth Wilkinson

soaked in.

I used to be afraid of the dark, but now the night has given me asylum. I now walk home with a sense of impudence when I see the beast tucked in alleys or towering up shadowy walls. I’ve grown accustomed to this new freedom, as I have nothing more to fear in man or shadow.

* CW: Sexual assault

“Snow Moon” Madeline Fehlman

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C
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ere's ice like welts
the windshield glass.
unlight twinkles through
the car and watch them melt,
edge, revealing the view
he window, at last,
defrosts itself.

Cold-frosted leaves
g heavy above blades
s sugar-coated with rime.
odils escaped the night's freeze:
rong, delicate yellow shine,
koning warmer days,
a summer breeze—

Before, I may
reached out to trace their
with a trail of frost, like
ter leaving dust in her wake,
ach petal with sparkling ice,
ling powerful, rare,
and unafraid.

“Snow Moon” Madeline Fehlman

So
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where I can run b
snow still fallin
the co