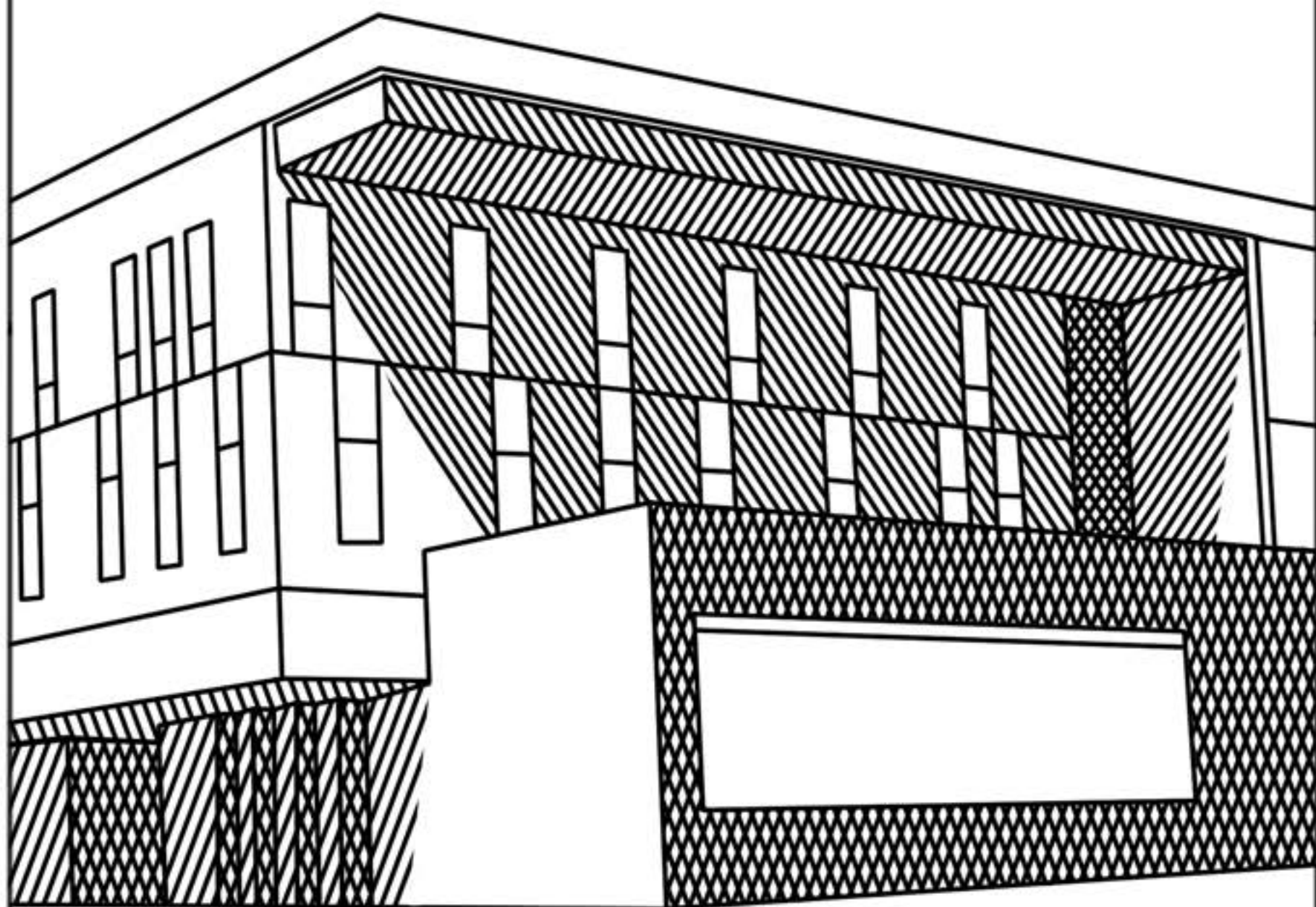


# THE MANZANITA



CSU, CHICO

ENGLISH GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

*Manzanita*  
2018

Edited by  
Megan Mann  
Catherine Wilcox  
Kelsey King  
Keaton Kirkpatrick

Compiled and Published by the  
English Graduate Student Council  
California State University, Chico

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California University, Chico  
400 West First Street  
Chico, Ca. 95929*

*Book Design by EGSC*

*Thank You*

To the following individuals and organizations for their generous contributions which made this publication possible.

The College of Humanities & Fine Arts  
California State University, Chico

Humanities & Fine Arts Dean,  
Robert Knight

English Department Chair,  
Tracy Butts

Advisor,  
Robert Davidson

Professors,  
Matthew Brown, Jeanne Clark, Kim Jaxon, Erin Kelly, Corey  
Sparks

Staff,  
Sharon DeMeyer  
Lisbed Santamaria

The Associated Students  
California State University, Chico



## *Contents*

### *Literature*

- 2-16 Kyler Dill**  
Beware the In-Between: An Analyzation of the  
Monstrous as Apologetic Rhetoric in Baldwin's *Beware  
the Cat*
- 17-22 Chelsea Evans**  
"A great talker upon little matters": Miss Bates as  
*Emma's* More Reliable Second Narrator

### *Poetry*

- 24-25 Annamarie Callahan**  
Where I've Been
- 26-28 Alyssa Cox**  
Mother O'Mine What Will I Do If I Meet Your Ghost  
Heading West?  
Death Shouldn't Be Required to See God  
After Moving to New York City in Spring of 2004 to  
Study Art and Forget His Past Life in a Tragedy
- 29-33 Keaton Kirkpatrick**  
Rock-a-bye  
Down the Street, One Block Away  
[Let me ask. Let me, please—just, ask.]
- 34-44 Carissa Maddox**  
Collection: I Wanted a Family
- 45-49 Anarosa Perez Vieyra**  
Collection: Letters to Melancholy

### *Prose*

- 51-67 Ian T. Allen**  
Moondance

*Prose (continued)*

**67-73 Charlotte Letellier**

Human

Half Past Seven

**74-83 Megan Mann**

Our Chili

**84-85 Allie Mueting**

Ever-Growing

**86-90 Amber Tovar**

10 tips from my first semester of college

# *Literature*

## Beware the In-Between: An Analysis of the Monstrous as Apologetic Rhetoric in Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*

By Kyler Dill

From a single cat consuming an entire sheep and the majority of a cow to a man concocting a witch-like potion in order to hear and understand cats, questions inevitably arise as to what William Baldwin's intentions were in his utilizations of monsters<sup>1</sup> in *Beware the Cat*. Described as a "clever little fable,"<sup>2</sup> "proto-magic realist satire,"<sup>3</sup> and a "wildly satirical prose narrative,"<sup>4</sup> William Baldwin was simultaneously constrained by the political happenings in England (and the greater Europe) and liberated by his generic selections. First written in 1553 but with tensions too high to enable printing<sup>5</sup>, Scott Lucas notes that *Beware the Cat* had "at least three editions between 1561 and 1584," (149). Therefore, Baldwin published the satire less than a half-century subsequent to Luther's 95 theses, under a decade after Mary Tudor's accession in England—followed shortly by Elizabeth I five years later, and right in the midst of John Calvin's death in 1564<sup>6</sup>. The prose narrative has received substantial accolades from scholars including its recognition by

<sup>1</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines monster as: "a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance."

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Maslen, "'The Cat Got Your Tongue': Pseudo-Translation, Conversion, and Control in William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*." *Translation & Literature*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, (1999): 3.

<sup>3</sup> See Rachel Stenner, "*The act of penning in William Baldwin's Beware the Cat*." *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 30, no. 3 (2015): 334.

<sup>4</sup> See Scott Lucas, "The Birth and Later Career of the Author William Baldwin (d. 1563)." *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 79, no.1 (2016): 149.

<sup>5</sup> Queen Mary's accession that same year caused the printing of *Beware the Cat* to be delayed, but once Elizabeth I took the throne it is clear that the text retained major popularity with multiple editions. For more, see William A. Ringler Jr., "'*Beware the Cat*' and the Beginnings of English Fiction," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 12, no. 2 (1979): 114.

<sup>6</sup> See Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History*. Modern Library, 2003.

many to be the first English novel<sup>7</sup> with Stephen Gresham averring Baldwin to be, “the most representative religious and moralistic writer of the reign of Edward VI.”<sup>8</sup> *Beware the Cat*’s anti-Catholic rhetoric has been given its due attention by scholars—like Stephen Gresham’s conjecture that *Beware the Cat* proved the possibilities of what literarily well-done satire could do to disparage Catholicism<sup>9</sup>--but the monstrous, marvelous, and magical requires further attention. Baldwin incorporates these through reason-holding cats, Master Streamer’s potion-fueled transformation of sorts, and other various monstrosities to argue against Christians leaning towards Catholicism, or unsure of Protestantism.

Beginning with a poem to the reader, a dedicatory epistle, and a general introductory “argument,” the ensuing text separates into three different parts led by Master Streamer and reported by William Baldwin. Master Streamer argues for cats having reason and language, in which he presents an anecdote of a fantastical cat named Grimalkin being killed by a man after eating a sheep and most of a cow. The man, once at home, relays the events to his wife whose house cat hears the tale and responds, “‘Hast thou killed Grimalkin!’ And therewith she plunged in his face and with her teeth took him by the throat, and

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Lucas, “The Birth and Later Career of the Author William Baldwin (d.1563),” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2016): 149; Stephen Gresham, “William Baldwin: Literary Voice of the Reign of Edward VI,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1981): 104; Terence N. Bowers, “The Production and Communication of Knowledge in William Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat*: Toward a Typographic Culture,” *Criticism* 33, no. 1, ENGLISH RENAISSANCE LITERATURE (1991): 1; William A. Ringler Jr., “‘*Beware the Cat*’ and the Beginnings of English Fiction,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 12, no. 2 (1979): 114.

<sup>8</sup> Gresham argues, likely an overstatement, that Baldwin trumps the usual representative, in Thomas Becon, of this title because of his range and variety of writings. See Stephen Gresham, “William Baldwin: Literary Voice of the Reign of Edward VI,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1981): 101, 116.

<sup>9</sup> Gresham, “William Baldwin” Literary Voice of the Reign of Edward VI”: 115.



ere that she could be plucked away, she had strangled him,” (14). Deliberation follows as to whether witches were taking up the bodies of cats—including a humorous comparison to Nicodemus questioning what being born again means in John 3—or whether Master Streamer’s story could be true. Streamer elects to respond with a personal testimony of his own transformation, given in the second part of the “novel,” when he consumes a self-made concoction that mirrors the doings of a witch in its disembodiment of animals and the precision of the recipe. The proceedings, intentionally comical at times, prove that the potion enabled him to hear and understand the language of the cats. The final section of Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat* unveils the life of cats through various anecdotes given by Mouse-Slayer, a cat on trial for disobeying a law apparently ubiquitously known in their “world.” I posit that all three parts display some form of monsters—intended by Baldwin as a ploy to criticize, even *condemn*, the in-between in the Protestant versus Catholic issue—whether it be Grimalkin and the witches in part one, Master Streamer’s inhuman representation in part two, or the cats acting human-like in the third. By constructing these monsters, Baldwin is Othering the Christians who find themselves wavering between the traditional Catholicism and the novel Protestantism—making it a call-to-action for these liminal Christians to choose sides.

Edward VI’s reign (comparatively more Protestant than Henry VIII and heavily influenced by John Calvin) and Elizabeth I’s Protestant control of the throne sandwiched Mary I’s desire to restore Catholicism in England<sup>10</sup>. William Baldwin, a decade subsequent to Mary’s accession, gave a sermon at Paul’s Cross, “using his sermon to vent his anger at the surviving members of the Marian episcopate and to urge those in authority

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<sup>10</sup> See Joseph Black et al., *British Literature: A Historical Overview*, vol. A. Broadview Press, 2010.

to hang every one of them.”<sup>11</sup> I postulate that this desire simply furthers what he had already written in *Beware the Cat* ten years earlier through his utilization of the monstrous to depict the dangers of not only Catholicism, but also the Christianly liminal (being between Protestant and Catholic).

Recent scholarship has obsessed over analyzing and exploding binaries—or, in the case of many post-humanists, shedding any idea of existing binaries—so the neglect of such scholarship on Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat* is surprising. A few scholars have hinted at the possibility of a liminal space between the reformer and the papist, such as Robert Maslen’s brief theory on Master Streamer as representation of Nicodemus, but the possibility that Baldwin wanted to make a claim about the issue of the in-between Christians has been left untouched<sup>12</sup>. Jennifer Loach argues that Catholicism survived well beyond Mary’s death, including some part of England staying firmly Catholic even by 1553, and the celebrations of many Londoners when Mary attempted to re-Catholicise England<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the Marian episcopate was a real opposition to the reformers in England throughout Baldwin’s life. The undecided, most likely confused, Christian remained throughout England and needed to be recognized and their theological ambiguity relieved. Enter, Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat*.

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<sup>11</sup> According to Scott Lucas, Baldwin, despite his lack of education, was allowed the opportunity to give a sermon at this most prominent religious venue. He died just a week later, in which Lucas questions what could have been if Baldwin’s life continued and he was able to further develop Elizabethan literature and Elizabethan Protestantism. I argue that *Beware the Cat*’s publication around this time—and more thereafter—allowed for more condemnation of the Marian episcopate. For more, see Lucas, “The Birth and Later Career of the Author William Baldwin (d. 1563).”

<sup>12</sup> See Robert Maslen, “‘The Cat Got Your Tongue’: Pseudo-Translation, Conversion, and Control in William Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat*.” *Translation & Literature*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, (1999).

<sup>13</sup> See Jennifer Loach, “Mary Tudor and the Re-Catholicisation of England.”

The third section of the narrative in particular is a continual depiction of the monstrous, replete with examples of putting the Protestant versus Catholic binary at odds with one another, making it the simplest point of entry into the text. For instance, a woman, newly blind, sends for the parish priest, “her old ghostly father,” (38). The cat, Mouse-slayer, notes that “all were voided the chamber save I and they two,” (38). The monstrous Mouse-slayer—being able both to speak and reason—represents a liminal entity in the space standing between the blind woman and the priest. Mouse-slayer remains unnoticed by the two, but symbolically exemplifies one of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s theses on monsters, as he posits that, “the monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place.”<sup>14</sup> This crossroads, the one separating Catholic from Protestant—undeniably a “certain cultural moment,” gets depicted in this moment of the text through the priest and the blind woman. The priest remarks his lack of surprise that she became sick and blind due to her past conversations with the enemy—the Protestants—when she did not call him, “when these new heretics teach you to leave the Catholic belief of Christ’s flesh in the sacrament,” (38). This allusion is of course to the doctrine of transubstantiation. The priest believes this to be the main concern in her meeting with the Protestants, which seems to confirm my thoughts on Baldwin’s use of monsters as transubstantiation—Christ’s body transforming into the bread and wine—brings up the idea of transforming/morphing into another entity, a very monster-like idea. Subsequent to the slight

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<sup>14</sup> Cohen’s piece gives seven theses for monsters and how they have been culturally understood and portrayed. The first thesis, which the quote stems from, he titled; “The Monster’s Body Is a Cultural Body.” For more, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, 1996: 4.

reprimand from the priest, Baldwin steps slightly out of the cover of satire and more explicitly critiques the Catholics through the woman's response:

‘Why sire,’ quod she, ‘I did send for you once, and when you came they posed you so with Holy Writ and saints’ writings that you could say nothing but call them “heretics,” and that they had made the New Testament themselves.’ (38)

Baldwin inserts a recapitulation of the quote in the margins, noting, “railing and slandering are the Papists’ Scriptures,” (38). As a reformer, Baldwin’s slandering of the Papists, doing exactly what he reproaches the Catholics for, comes as no surprise. The complication of the scene come with the blind woman being healed by the priest, which would seem to allude to some sort of miraculous powers in the hands of the Catholics if not for Mouse-slayer noting that the same situation for her “kitlings” would lead to an even worse state for them. While the Catholics show no depth of biblical understanding—referring to the priest’s inability to counter the Protestants, they at least get cured of blindness. The in-between represented by the cats are left in a poorer situation.

The episode with the priest offers an explicit example of Baldwin’s fears of Christians going back-and-forth in their theology. This can be grounded in Scriptural texts that *Beware the Cat* seems to apply in confronting the liminal Christian. For instance, James 1:6 reads, “But let him aske in faith, and wauer not: for he that wauereth, is like a waue of the sea, tost of the winde, and caryed away.”<sup>15</sup> The individual has no choice of their own once they begin to waver; they are simply left to nature. The reader can sense the fear in the priest of this happening when the

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<sup>15</sup> See *The Geneva Bible*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2007. Also: “How long shalt ye between two opinions?” (1 Kings 18:21) and “Turne not to the right hand, nor to the left, but remoue thy fote from euil,” (Proverbs 4:27).

blind woman entertains the Protestants. Baldwin attempts to keep the reader in that moment—one that includes a doubtful and fearful Catholic. I argue that the priest embodies Baldwin in the actual-world as Baldwin aims to deter the wavering or liminal Christian from returning to Catholicism—in this case, to the side with the miraculous—just as the priest challenges the blind woman on listening to the Protestants. Robert Maslen does well to state that: “Magic, in fact, is the preferred method of the Catholic Church for retaining the loyalty of its *wavering* followers,” (6, italics mine). Interestingly, Mouse-slayer pursues the miracles, but does not achieve the same results.<sup>16</sup> This seems to allude to Mouse-slayer residing outside of the realm of influence for the Catholics, but she has no intention of seeking the methods of the Protestants to cure her blind kitlings.

The trope of the monstrous Other in Medieval and Early Modern literature both complicates and confirms Baldwin’s creation of cats with reason.<sup>17</sup> If, as Serina Patterson puts it, “monsters become an early modern marvel anchored in teratology...and are in opposition to medieval depictions of monsters as creatures existing divinely or geographically at the edges of human existence,”<sup>18</sup> then Baldwin’s cats—and the wavering Christian—would be recognized as a “freak” within the community. In other words, although the liminal Christian

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<sup>16</sup> To better understand monsters/marvels versus miracles within Protestantism, see Alan Bates, “Good, Common, Regular, and Orderly: Early Modern Classifications of Monstrous Births,” *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 18 (2005).

<sup>17</sup> Cats with reason would undoubtedly have been a monstrous issue as the recognized and believed chain of being separated humanity from animals due to their lack of reason.

<sup>18</sup> See Serina Patterson, “Reading the Medieval in Early Modern Monster Culture.” *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 111, no. 2 (Spring, 2014): 287. Patterson’s contention is based upon Garland-Thompson’s, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourses in Modernity.” *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

resides within society, their theological understandings are worthy of being ostracized. Protestants frequently constructed monsters within various forms of literature to represent the social and political issues.<sup>19</sup> Baldwin decided that the Marian episcopate—and its posthumous efforts (in regard to Mary)—necessitated a critical commentary. This commentary closely mirrors that of an instance in the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth.<sup>20</sup> To follow this line of flight, the goal of Baldwin would be to publicly acknowledge the wrongdoing of the liminal Christian, to rebuke them, and then to rid of them—make them an Other. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s fourth thesis on monsters, “The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference,” contributes further insight into Baldwin’s religious polemic. Cohen avers, “representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic.”<sup>21</sup> Due to Scott Lucas’s biographical work on Baldwin, we know that Baldwin called for the hanging of the Marian episcopate, a quasi-liminal Christianity, in its entirety during a sermon at Paul’s Cross.<sup>22</sup>

As a satire, it is easy to try locating the cats in the Papist’s camp or the Protestants’, but Baldwin breaks down any connections—leaving them, inevitably, in-between, an Early Modern Other. In the introductory poem, Baldwin jests, “the Cat

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<sup>19</sup> Patterson, “Reading the Medieval in Early Modern Monster Culture.”

<sup>20</sup> See 1 Corinthians 5. In this chapter, a man is known to have been having some type of incestual relationships with his “father’s wife.” If the man is thought of as a Protestant (the fruit of Catholicism) and the couple as Catholicism, this allusion achieves what I believe Baldwin argues needs to be done in *Beware the Cat*. The man is engaging in relational sin with his, presumed to be, step-mother. This mirrors the Marian episcopate, the liminal Christian, as they take part in the counter-reformation—returning to their heritage, or at least toying with the idea. The call-to-action that the Apostle Paul puts on Corinth is to give the man over to the devil.

<sup>21</sup> See Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*: (8).

<sup>22</sup> Lucas, “The Birth and Later Career of the Author William Baldwin (d. 1563)”: (162).

gan tell / Of many pranks of Popish priest,” (1).<sup>23</sup> The intention of the alliteration would seem to be to offer a foundation of humor or light-heartedness to the text. The Grimalkin anecdote<sup>24</sup>, taking place in the early stages of the narrative, disrupts the comical. Grimalkin enters a church where two men (father and son) roasted a sheep and demands to be given some meat. Subsequent to consuming the entire animal, Grimalkin causes the men to flay a cow and feed her that as well “and doubting lest, when she had eaten that, she would eat them too because they had no more for her,” (13) they fled the church on horseback. Grimalkin, in pursuit, received a deathly blow from the father’s arrow, which then led to “such a sight of cats that...his boy was killed and eaten up,” (14). The story concludes with the man’s wife’s house cat strangling the man. The violent descriptions of the murdering of the two men takes away from what would be a laughable event—thinking of a cat eating animals even larger than herself, an army of cats chasing and fighting the men, and the peculiarity of the house cat

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<sup>23</sup> It would be remiss not to point out the importance of oral narratives amidst this printed text. Baldwin hopes to call into question the Catholics’ traditions and their means of disseminating them. With the Protestants’ setting immense importance upon the printed Word, Baldwin combines, or complicates, the two—showing far more favor towards the printed—*Beware the Cat*. For more on this, see Bowers, “The Production and Communication of Knowledge in William Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat*: Toward a Typographic Culture.” To read about the form *Beware the Cat* takes as a text, look to: Stenner, “*The act of penning in William Baldwin’s Beware the Cat*.” See also, for the role of printing and translation in the Protestant context, Maslen, “‘The Cat Got Your Tongue’: Pseudo-Translation, Conversion, and Control in William Baldwin’s ‘Beware the Cat’”.

<sup>24</sup> The Grimalkin tale does not originate with Baldwin, but is recognized as a folk tale. See James T. Brachter, “The Grimalkin Story in Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat*.” *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 53, Issue 4, (Dec. 2006): pp. 428-430. William Ringler Jr. also notes that Baldwin’s “Irish werewolf story is from Griaadlus Cambrensis’s *Topographia Hiberniae*, his presciential pills from *Tales and Quick Answers*, and his old bawd and her weeping cat from Caxton’s *Aesop*,” for more from Ringler on Baldwin’s inventions see Ringler Jr., “‘Beware the Cat’ and the Beginnings of English Fiction”: 122.

defending the honor of Grimalkin. The culmination of the retelling of Grimalkin's death seems to be a concise condemnation of the Pope and his clergy. Baldwin writes:

or as the Pope hath had ere this over all Christendom, in whose cause all his clergy would not only scratch and bite, but kill and burn to powder (though they knew not why) whomsoever they thought to think but once against him—which Pope, all things considered, devoureth more at every meal than Grimalkin did at her last supper. (15)

Not only is the Pope compared to Grimalkin, but his clergy “are crueller than cats,” (15, Baldwin states this in the marginalia of the text). An apt opportunity to point out the Pope's gluttony and wastefulness, the reformer notes that the cats are not completely analogous to the Papists. On the other hand, it is improbable that Baldwin hoped for these unmerciful cats to align with the Protestants in his readers' minds. Instead, they remain in-between, wavering medially amid both sects of Christianity, serving as a warning—hence one of the reasons for the title's use of “beware”<sup>25</sup>—to not be tossed amidst the waves of indecision.

Master Streamer's transformation in the second part of Baldwin's novel represents another moment of rebuke towards the liminal Christian. Streamer dances on both sides of Christianity, and if Robert Maslen's remark that his hypocrisy manifests itself in the middle section of the narrative<sup>26</sup>, then Baldwin could be equating hypocrisy with the in-between “believer”. Maslen proves Streamer's hypocrisy in part two with

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<sup>25</sup> Another likely interpretation of Baldwin's use of “beware” in the title is their ability to see all that you do. The house cat recognizes the lies you tell to get a woman to sleep with a man—namely, the possibility of turning into a sad cat if she does not. This interpretation does not contend with mine postulations, but may complicate them a bit. If one is supposed to beware the watching cat, and that cat is representative of the Christian stuck between Protestantism and Catholicism, then a critique of the mud-slinging between the two sides could be present. The liminal Christian may not think either side is right if all they have to weigh them is their slander towards each other.

<sup>26</sup> See Maslen, ““The Cat Got Your Tongue””: (13).



his “attack on superstitious hunters,” while participating in his own superstitious hunting by making a magic potion out of various animal parts (13). He (Maslen) continues on to compare Streamer to Nicodemus, the Pharisee that came to see Jesus at night (in fear of being seen by other Pharisees) in John 3. I find this allusion intriguing, but requiring a further analysis than, “The gloom that enshrouds the comic stories of the third part of *Beware the Cat* indicates the not-so-comic fate of the stories’ protagonists: they are to be condemned to the darkness they have embraced, and so, if he is not careful, will their fictional narrator be,” (13-14). As a recognized satire, what implications arise when thinking of the cats, “the stories’ protagonists,” and possibly Streamer, being condemned to darkness? Who or what is Baldwin dooming to hell? It is the monstrous, the liminal Christian, the hypocrites, that Baldwin condemns. William Ringler Jr. posits “the general thrust” of Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat* is that Streamer’s stories are as unbelievable as the “unwritten verities” pervading through the Catholic Church, which they argue stem from its “traditions.”<sup>27</sup> Of course Baldwin takes the time to criticize the rivaling theology—Catholicism—but I think Ringler Jr. settles a little too short in arguing this to be the crux of Baldwin’s novel. Streamer’s ridiculous tales and “scholarly” logic appear as more of a line of flight that Baldwin encourages the reader to pursue, but, as the title suggests, we are supposed to beware the cat—the in-between Christian. This suggests that being wholly Protestant remains the only option for true Christians.

Master Streamer’s transformation leads to some curious moments within the second part of *Beware the Cat*. He concocts a magical potion that enables him to hear the cats speak with each other. In the midst of his transformation, Streamer believes

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<sup>27</sup> See Ringler Jr., “‘Beware the Cat’ and the Beginnings of English Fiction”: 123.

the devil to be upon him more than once. Accidentally stepping on a foxtail, Streamer explains, “I deemed it had been the Devil indeed. And therefore I cried out as loud as ever I could, ‘The Devil, the Devil, the Devil!’,” and shortly later, “I thought that the Devil had come indeed and seized upon me,” (33). In both examples, Streamer uses the word “indeed” as if the suspicion of the devil coming during his magical potion making was expected. Ambroise Paré published his encyclopedic book, *On Monsters and Marvels*, twenty years<sup>28</sup> after *Beware the Cat* was written, but right around the same time that Baldwin’s novel went into print. In Paré’s chapter “On The Art Of Magic,” he writes that “the art of magic is done by the wicked artifice of the devil...all of which do nothing but deceive and abuse disbelievers [in Christian faith]...Above all these men must be avoided and driven afar by those who know the true religion, as Moses did by God’s commandment.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, it is altogether plausible that Baldwin’s readers would have felt the same while reading *Beware the Cat* causing them to question Streamer’s character—most likely labeling him a hypocrite as well.

Streamer’s argument for cats having reason begins as an oral retelling of narratives he heard from others. The other men he discusses these tales with debate the cats’ identities actually being that of witches. In this moment, the nod Robert Maslen makes towards a biblical allusion to Nicodemus—as I touched on earlier—appears explicitly. One of Master Streamer’s colleagues, disagreeing with witches becoming cats, counters, “but where you spake of intrusion of a woman’s body into a cat’s, you either *play Nichodem* or the stubborn Popish conjurer,” (17, italics mine). Streamer’s friend not only links Nicodemus to this impossibility, but also brings up another

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<sup>28</sup> In Janis L. Pallister’s introduction to her translation of *On Monsters and Marvels* sets the publication date at 1573, with many other publications by Paré within that same decade.

<sup>29</sup> See Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*. Translated by Janis L. Pallister, University of Chicago Press, 1982: (95).

moment of monsters, marvels, and magic in his use of “Popish conjurer.” I believe that this is not coincidental as Baldwin looks to describe the medial-thinking Christian yet again. Nicodemus, in the biblical example, felt unsettled about the possibilities of Jesus being the Christ, but as a Pharisee he could not engage Jesus in these questions in public. Thus, not yet convinced enough to be disenfranchised from his pharisaical puissance nor to join the ranks of Jesus’s following, Nicodemus sought him out at night. Nicodemus immediately salutes Jesus’s coming from God “for no man colde do these miracles that thou doest.”<sup>30</sup> Jesus responds with the famous “born again” statement causing a befuddlement in Nicodemus. Nicodemus’s association with the marvel that is a witch becoming a cat allows for another instance of the theologically in-between embodying the marvel, the monstrous.

As the first English novel, *Beware the Cat* exhibits creative narratology, an intriguing and nearly ineffable generic identity, and talking, reasoning cats. The presentation of the monstrous in the text, replete and varying in appearance, calls attention to the in-between. The kairotic moment that Baldwin finds himself in allows for *Beware the Cat*’s commentary and critique on the religious polemics of the sixteenth century. It is through this novel that we can recognize the result of the whiplash England goes through religiously—Catholic to Protestant to Catholic and back to Protestant—but the lack of sympathy from Baldwin for those stuck in-between.

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**“A great talker upon little matters”: Miss Bates as *Emma*’s  
More Reliable Second Narrator**

*By Chelsea Evans*

In Jane Austen’s *Emma*, the verbose old maid Miss Bates stands in contrast to the heroine. Miss Bates is poor, old, and ridiculous where Emma is rich, young, and clever. Emma’s speech is polished and fluent, while Miss Bates rambles, switches topics abruptly, and dwells on mundane details that seem unimportant. Mary Hong reflects a widely-accepted critical opinion of the “meaninglessness of Miss Bates’ discourse” when she explains how in Miss Bates’ case, “the more one talks, the less one’s words mean” (Hong 237; 238). Susan Wolfson, who also notes a long history of readers who defame Miss Bates’ “big blocks of babble,” reveals that both she and her students tend to skip past her speeches, or at least to be “driven to daydreaming while she rattled on about everything and nothing” (Wolfson 5). Yes, Miss Bates’ speech is “characterized by excessive repetition” but what she repeats are not “nothings” (Parrill 1; Wolfson 5). While her verbal effusions can be tiresome, careful analysis of her narrative contributions reveals that Miss Bates should be more than just the butt of a joke. She is a bumbling truth-teller, revealing important insights about Austen’s characters and enlarging the boundaries of their concerns. Miss Bates provides a much-needed foil to Emma’s speculations, functioning as a more-reliable narrator who widens the scope of the novel beyond Emma’s narrow upper-class society.

Miss Bates functions as a secondary narrator, recounting previous conversations and events rather than giving speculations or opinions. Miss Bates focuses on the details of everyday exchanges between people, describing events with startling accuracy and minutiae. Getting past the mixed-up syntax reveals gems of knowledge. For example, a long speech about a gift of baked apples from Mr. Knightley is a couple of

pages worth of half-sentences, interrupted often by dashes, including several inserted exclamations on side-topics. In this case, Miss Bates' narration sets up Mr. Knightley as a compassionate man when he otherwise might be viewed as rather cold. This teaches the reader to favor him as a worthy hero. Miss Bates tells her listeners that the apples she has are "some of Mr. Knightley's most liberal supply. He sends us a sack every year" (Austen 165). This is apparently the common habit of Mr. Knightley, not just a one-time gift, indicating a habit of generosity. Miss Bates also reveals that Mr. Knightley sacrificed his own share of the apples to give them to the Bateses. She says, "He had brought them all—and now [Mr. Knightley] had not one left to bake or boil" (165). Miss Bates, unable to keep herself from communicating even the uncomfortable truths, "wanted to keep it from Jane's knowledge" so she could enjoy the apples without guilt, but of course "mentioned it before [she] was aware" (166). After which Miss Bates says, "[Jane] was quite distressed that I had owned the apples were so nearly gone" (165). Mr. Knightley's giving nature and Jane's genteel pride both come into relief here, an important distinction that Miss Bates makes for the discerning reader. Miss Bates' "nothings" are no more trivial than Emma's games and matchmaking; they are ill-expressed, but they reveal facts about characters' behavior rather than speculations.

Miss Bates' narration sets her up as a more reliable voice—though a less distinguished one—than the primary narrator or the heroine. Emma is clever, and we are encouraged to identify with her not only because she is the heroine but also through Austen's heavy use of free indirect discourse, bringing the reader often into Emma's mind; but she is a flawed and complicated character. Indeed, her flaws are what make her interesting; but those flaws—her self-absorption, tendency to speculate, meddling in other people's relationships, and her blindness toward the true nature of other people—make her an

unreliable source of information. She communicates primarily about herself, and certainly from a limited perspective. The novel's narrator is not necessarily unreliable, but because of the tendency toward free indirect discourse, the reader is often unsure whose perspective is being voiced. If Emma's, it's likely blinded in some way. Miss Bates is more straightforward. We understand her "universal good-will and contented temper" which causes her to "love every body, [and be]... quick-sighted to every body's merits" (17). But this bias toward the positive is easier to navigate and allow for than Emma's many biases against people in her own favor. One important insight gained from Miss Bates that Emma (and the narrator) fails to give is in respect to Jane Fairfax. Emma speaks scornfully of Jane as "no great favorite" with her and determines repeatedly that she "could not forgive her" for being less communicative than Emma would like (75; 117). She is motivated by her view of Jane as rival for the attentions and affections of the whole town. If we rely on Emma to see Jane, we only know that she is quiet, "elegant," and an object of jealousy for Emma. The narrator gives a history to Jane but little evidence of her true character. Miss Bates reveals more substance about Jane, showing her to be a good-natured girl. Miss Bates tells Emma of Jane's quiet concern and considerate helpfulness, showing how Jane offered to help around the house because she was concerned that Miss Bates had "'a little cold,'" (120). Jane cares deeply about her family, and she suffers greatly behind the scenes because of her uncertain future and kept secrets. We only find out about her suffering due to Miss Bates' narration to Emma of Jane's "'tears...in her eyes perpetually'" and her being "'as low as possible'" after her decision to begin her career (261). Miss Bates is an adoring aunt, so the reader may be tempted to overlook her opinion as too biased; but alongside her opinion, Miss Bates tells very plainly *what happens*. The facts about



Jane's actions can stand on their own in opposition to Emma's more negative, jealousy-motivated speculations.

As a secondary narrator, Miss Bates also widens the scope of the novel beyond the insular, stifling society of the Highbury gentry. She provides one of the only hints to international concerns in the overall-domestic novel when she describes Jane's potential visit to Ireland as being "in different kingdoms, I was going to say, but however different countries" (110), a reference to the recent establishment of the United Kingdom. This brings the reader's mind out of the insulated community of Highbury, a very remarkable moment in a novel overall interested only in an extremely small community. Miss Bates also brings the conversation back to the poor. She is herself considered poor, as she has fallen from a position of comparative wealth. She also humanizes the very poor in Highbury, giving life to poor characters who are otherwise glossed over as unimportant. In contrast to the gypsies, who are simply maligned, or the servants who supply the party at Box Hill, who are barely mentioned, Miss Bates tells a personal story about a poor member of Highbury. In a long speech to Emma, Miss Bates mentions former clerk "poor old John Abdy...bed-ridden, and very poorly with the rheumatic gout in his joints" and his son who is an "ostler...and...cannot keep his father without some help" and requests "relief from the parish" (264). This is a unique window into the life of Highbury's commoners and servants, those who need church help to get by. Miss Bates is a bridge between Emma's well-to-do circle and the truly poor. Maaja Stewart notes that this gives us "brief glimpses of... workers, not only vagrants, [who] have been pauperized by a system no one quite understands" (428). This asks the reader to confront some uncomfortable truths about life that are quietly existing in the margins of the novel, unnoticed. Miss Bates' over-communication can seem random, but she actually widens *Emma's* limited sphere.

The uncomfortable, rambling narration of Miss Bates is a necessary foil for Emma's bias, a check to the stifling politeness of Highbury convention, and an expander of the novel's insulated concerns. Austen's use of Miss Bates' rambling is certainly intentional and goes beyond comic purposes to speak of the importance of the "little matters" of life. Emma decries Harriet's speculation that Emma, if she chooses to remain single, will be "an old maid at last, like Miss Bates" (Austen 62). Emma insists she never will be like Miss Bates—"so silly—so satisfied—so smiling" (62). The word *silly* particularly stands out here when we consider another uncomfortable Miss Bates moment. When Emma compliments Jane's handwriting, Miss Bates repeats the compliment to her mother, after which "Emma had the advantage of hearing her own silly compliment repeated twice over" (109). Emma, usually very satisfied with her own statements, finds it irksome to hear her "silly compliment" repeated, not (I would suggest) because it is repeated, but because it is silly and disingenuous. Part of what irks Emma about Miss Bates is that she recognizes her own silliness reflected in Miss Bates' voice. Miss Bates is silly, to be sure, but so is Emma, and so are we, and those "little matters" Miss Bates recounts are in reality the substance of life, deserving of much more attention than we care to spare. Patricia Spacks' observation that "Highbury's gossip substitutes for meaningful life" is a bit incomplete (410). Miss Bates' silliness is in the manner, not the substance, of her communication, as Emma recognizes in herself a similar ridiculousness. But the gossip *is* the meaningful life. Even trivial accounts of apples add up to something meaningful in Miss Bates' conversation, revealing the facts about characters and showing what the narrator and Emma fail to address. It is unfair, therefore, to indict Miss Bates for being a "great talker upon little matters" when the entire novel revolves around making much of little things (Austen 17). Emma's declaration, "You will get nothing to the purpose from

Miss Bates... she will tell you nothing,” is only true if we refuse to pay attention (176).

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# *Poetry*

**Where I've Been**  
*By Annamarie Callahan*

Touch my hands, small,  
with nails as sharp as thorn.  
Listen to them scratch the surface.

Travel up and trace the scars  
that decorate my wrists.  
The tissues just a tad more white  
than my own porcelain skin.

See how they follow these blue lines,  
these rivers of veins,  
faintly present, and yet, stand out.

Pursue the trail until  
your palms presses against my shoulder.  
Ask me why my skin grows cold on summer days.

A line of ink is embedded into flesh,  
danced upon collar bone,  
it escorts you to my throat.

Like vines your hands wrap around my neck.  
Feel the pulsing of my vessels in your grasp.

Look upon me and ask,  
about the pinpricks on my face,  
where skin is sallow, bruised and blue.

My lips quiver but refuse to speak.  
Force them open,  
and reach into my mouth.

Know I am the quiet distance  
between the trees.  
The road of black  
carves out a creek,  
separating groves of pines,

as my sternum separates my lungs.

Look, where your eyes meet mine.  
My doe eyes, wide and curious.  
As green as fern, with flecks of bark  
drifting in the emerald sea.

Let go of me and brush your hands  
against your person.  
The earth breaks apart,  
and falls away as dirt.

**Mother O' Mine, What Will I Do If I Meet Your Ghost  
Heading West?**

*By Alyssa Cox*

*Grab God by His blue hand,  
Tell Him that Judas loved jellybeans, as only a mother could  
know.*

*Tell Him flawed and burning are not reasons (unfortunately),  
But measure exactly, distinctively, how he was carried.*

You took me to the Grand Canyon, told me to greet each spire  
As if they were one of Whitman's busted company.  
When we descended at sunset, I imagined whales  
Swimming playfully in the clouds on their way to Philadelphia.

*Dressed as they are in cracks and silvery rings,  
Delicate pout above a splayed neck:  
Put Joan of Arc in a gymnasium and see  
How well she takes to ponytails in the summer.*

In the back of a Volkswagen,  
We laughed, pinning our reflections to the windows.  
Powdered noses and waxy lips like soap, groundless.  
You told me I don't yet know what once-beautiful will mean.

*What an accomplishment to have amputated  
Loyal and frantic Antigone.  
Look in one of Barbie's eyes and you might see Eve's empty  
throne,  
Glittering green grass and hungry.*

Betsy Ross checks the yards of fabric  
As you, Mother, check the yards in front and back of the house;  
Wholly, they are the same.  
What is buried in both is easily known, overflowing.

**Death Shouldn't Be Required to See God***By Alyssa Cox*

She's spending her young life looking for God.  
In the voice of a poet,  
In a comfort of cats, black and running.  
Maybe God's in the clouds, the flower buds,  
Puddles turned to mirrors on the pavement.  
Did God use them to fix Her makeup,  
To check the parting of Her hair?

She looks for God  
In a flattened squirrel on the side of the road:  
She stoops, peering at the fur and blood.  
Closer. As if she could read some message there.

She looked for God in herself,  
But found only tired atoms and lives within  
That were not her own.  
She looked in oil on canvas,  
In shrunken petals on faded porches,  
The squeals of children, bright  
With new and peppery freedom.

She will look in the people she was too cowardly to speak to.  
In the truck, her father's, with the sand and salt in every crevice  
Because it's been sitting next to the waves too long.  
In the medicine in her mother's veins, she will look  
Because death shouldn't be required to see God.



**After Moving to New York City in Spring of 2004 to Study  
Art and Forget His Past Life in a Tragedy**

*By Alyssa Cox*

Dear Rosalin,

~~I messed up~~

How are you? We haven't spoken in a while.

I wanted to tell you that spring is a surprise every time.

That I wish I could have made you stay for breakfast. That night,

Watching the headlights scan my bedroom wall. And the  
sunlight,

Mimicking them in the morning. Without you.

I spilled vodka on my sketchbook (a new one, the purple and  
gray one is filled),

And thought of you.

I saw a kestrel on a man's arm, through a window, briefly,

And thought of you.

You left my life with the snap and finality of a broken neck.

~~I avoid mirrors~~

There was an arc of streetlights in the rain, one flickered,

And you were there, a ghost summoned by a song.

~~It takes two to ruin a relationship~~

We never got to dance, love.

To have youth is to be guilty,

But that is no excuse.

I've rambled.

Rosalin, your hair is copper in the sun.

Did you know that?

I no longer call myself poet, but you must know

That in the winter, the stars freeze themselves into sugar lumps  
for your Earl Grey.

Romeo

**Rock-a-bye**

*By Keaton Kirkpatrick*

My wife's hand is crowding the reddened skin of the only apple to have fallen from the tree. Her other hand cradles the emptiness behind her navel. She hasn't taken her eyes away from the vibrant skin. The path out of the fog-clad orchard is empty. We need to go home, but we can't take our first step. We can't even try.

*A would-be mother  
holding a still, just-birthed hand  
never letting go*

**Down the Street, One Block Away***By Keaton Kirkpatrick*

By the dumpster  
of the alley  
after the turn  
from the sidewalk  
below the bottom step  
in front of the backdoor—  
was a son.

He had just slid and broke open  
on the ice held  
by a pothole that was filled  
with vomit  
from some underage girl who had just found out that alcohol  
burns worse when thrown  
from her throat  
after a party  
at a rich kid's house, while his parents were out.

On the couch there lay a cop whose fingers were inches  
from the stained carpet. He had just gotten back  
after working a long night  
with his partner, who had just broken up  
with his girl the night before.  
On duty, his partner was still drunk and told him  
about wanting  
to break something  
to recover  
from his loss. His partner threw up  
outside the driver's side window  
at the end  
of his shift.

The strange thing  
about the son was that when his face found the asphalt  
of the alley  
under the ice, it left an imprint  
of a baton

on the back  
of his head.

**[Let me ask. Let me, please—just, ask.]***By Keaton Kirkpatrick*

Let me ask. Let me, please—just, ask.

If, if you could possibly tell me  
something about—where you were.

Where you were that time—some time ago—  
when I was by the lake with your brother, the one, who—well,  
you know.

I skipped a stone—across the lake, I mean.

And I remember            seeing those tiny ripples  
growing into upside-down giants' halos, as they do and have  
always done.

And now I'm thinking of you back then, back just after we met,  
but I forget where you were, or went, or I don't, really, know—  
do you?

So that's why I want to ask you where you were, back, back  
when,

you know, well, that all happened. Do you remember?

Were you by the sliding glass door, holding onto the—what-do-  
you-call-it?

Pully thingy. You know, to adjust the door's blinds. That thing.  
Were you holding that?

I guess I just want to know now, because, I didn't ever  
get the chance, my love.

I didn't ever get to ask you if that day when your brother—  
if that day, when you were somewhere else, if you felt almost as  
helpless,

or—hopeless—as I do now. I'll tell you where I was, when I  
heard—when I got the call.

Not about your brother,

but you, I mean. You knew that, since—I was with your brother,  
when he—well, when it happened, at the lake.

But I was on the floor, when my phone started to—ring, loudly.

Thank God, really. Because if I weren't there, and got that call?

I'd be there after I heard your dad try to—

choke out            some words.

There wasn't enough noise then. Just me and your dad's voice.

But he was quiet then. I wish there were more noise.  
But nope.  
Just me.

So I guess I want to ask you where you were,  
but only since I need to know.  
Why do I need to know?  
Well, how'd you get by? After your brother—  
because I was just on the floor when I heard about you,  
waiting to feel better.  
Trying to cool down and not throw up across our—  
well—my bathroom rug.  
And I could have helped you, if I were there—maybe?  
Probably—yeah. I could've.  
But I was on the floor. Couldn't kiss you at the red light.  
Maybe it would have turned green, while we were kissing, I  
mean—and that truck would have just passed through  
their red light, while the car behind us punched their horn.

**I Wanted a Family***By Carissa Maddox*

Aisilyn has a story to tell you at the top of her lungs even if you're in the middle of talking to someone else because you need to know the information right this very second

backwards words  
fill pages in workbooks  
she's never finished  
as creativity flings  
in all directions  
creating chaos on the page  
as she strings embellished  
stories of pirates  
children in the park  
car rides to nowhere  
aided by left-handed drawings  
learning but not wanting  
to learn or put effort  
into listening as her  
father teaches and explains  
dressing in mismatched  
clothes but all her own  
design and on her own  
terms small frame  
with a loud voice  
speaks of stories  
upon stories  
continually thinking  
even when food flies from lips  
eager to tell and string  
lines of poetry and prose  
together into something  
strangely sweetly distinctly  
hers as stillness escapes her  
even when tucked under  
blankets sleep weaves  
dreams of adventure  
horror fantasy piled

inside a growing brain  
that can hardly contain  
all the stories eager for ears



The virgin Womb of a mother

I knew of you  
at an early age—  
pre-adolescent planning  
for a wedding and a visit  
from the fowl of creation  
filled my diary and conversations  
at slumber parties.  
My friends and I  
placed balls under our  
shirts as we played house  
and carried baby dolls—  
preparing for our mother roles.

At nine years old,  
I woke up in a pool  
of blood, scared and embarrassed—  
then having to go quietly  
to my own room,  
to get a pair of clean panties.  
You, O Womb, smiled  
that day for your short  
life had begun.

I was too young to realize  
your importance in my life.  
I was too young to see  
through the pain and too  
young to think of children.

Nineteen years later,  
I'm constantly reminded  
of your presence,  
your persistence,  
your wanting.

I have yet to give you  
the opportunity to mold

clay into the makings  
of a human  
that looks like us—  
with blue eyes  
and freckles, blonde  
hair with curls,  
a strong smile  
and hidden confidence.

I know your cries  
for I feel them deep  
within, yearning to carry  
a child  
just one  
before time runs out.

O, my precious Womb,  
you look upon children  
who aren't yours  
and beg me to help  
see your dreams come true—  
the dreams of the big  
family, those children  
with red and blonde hair...

the dreams of becoming  
a *mother*.

But I am a mother,  
Womb, don't you see?  
I make sure laundry  
has been done,  
field questions from young  
curious brains—do art  
with the intention  
of plastering the walls.  
I have experienced  
late nights  
cleaning vomit while

trying not to wake  
the ones still sleeping.  
The exhaustion from driving  
to all activities and scheduling  
play dates—forgetting  
my own friends and obligations.  
And not to mention  
the worry of sending them  
back to their mom's  
out of fear  
that they might  
get hurt, again.

I stand with you on  
hopes you will create  
a baby—half Angelo, half us.

Society might be ticking  
at your clock, saying  
*You're too old!*  
But don't listen to them.  
Women in their forties are still  
having babies—their careers  
at the forefront of their minds.  
We're not even thirty!

Time is on our side,  
waiting doesn't seem  
so long now.

Aurora

1.

Months after I started  
dating Angelo, I found  
my teenage Bible case.  
Inside I found two lists,  
one titled “Daughter Names.”

I remembered writing this—  
it took me weeks and weeks  
to complete, adding names  
I found interesting and fitting  
for my daughter. “Aurora”  
was the first listed.

I remember when  
an old co-worker named  
her daughter Aurora  
and how mad I got—  
*That’s what I wanted  
to name my daughter.*

I thought to myself.

Every time I heard  
her name, I felt betrayed,  
like a piece of me  
was gone, even though  
it never existed.  
My dreams of having Aurora  
were over before  
she was created.

In the moment of finding  
that list, I held back tears—  
I had many plans, but  
the only one that came true  
was having a daughter Aurora.

So many daughters I was  
going to have and Aurora  
is now one of them.

## 2.

From a young age,  
I wanted to name  
a daughter Aurora—  
a long-haired blonde  
who was spunky and intelligent  
with an eagerness to learn everything.

I wanted a family,  
an organic one—stemming  
from marriage, pregnancy,  
house, career—my own  
*physical* creation.

I used to laugh with friends  
as we sat in PJs  
and cut out images  
of weddings and careers,

*Four kids is my limit!  
I'm not sure my vagina  
could take any more after that!*

I wanted this life  
I planned out—  
all at twenty-one—  
a child's imagination  
and creation of what would,  
not *could*, come to fruition.

*If my parents did it  
when they were that age,*

*then so will I.*

3.

Now, so many years later,  
one of my step-kids,  
the oldest, is Aurora.

Spunky—innovative—  
first-born—keeper of sisters—  
illusion of responsibility—  
indecisive.

If I ask, she does  
(but only if it's surrounded  
by authority over her sisters).

If given a challenge,  
she'll throw a fit—  
saying, *I can't do it!*  
even though she never  
tried.

If allowed the opportunity,  
she'll entertain you with  
stories, songs on her flute,  
plays she made up, even  
give you a walk-on part  
on her new fashion talk show.

She's an emotional child  
(honestly, who isn't)  
who takes the brunt of her  
younger sister's blame  
because she doesn't  
want to fight.  
She asks constantly if she

can make dinner  
or help  
to prepare lunch—she  
received a cookbook and tools  
for Christmas and planned  
out all our meals and snacks  
for an entire week.

Her gut reaction is to lie—  
    *Is your room clean?*  
    *Did you do your homework?*—  
and then wonders why  
her younger siblings don't tell  
the truth. Is

she playing her parents?  
Maybe. Is she imitating  
behaviors she's seen?  
Probably. She's a kid.

She wants to be:  
    a fashion model  
    a teacher  
    a gymnast  
    a rich woman  
    a chef  
    a performer  
    a hair dresser  
    a designer  
    an advocate  
    a good student  
    a dancer  
    an actress  
        (yes, it's different than  
        a performer)

She wants to do everything  
and anything that catches  
her heart.

She gives freely—  
thinking up new gifts  
to make for holidays  
and any reason she deems  
worthy of gift-giving.

She's a daughter, sister  
future wife and mother—  
protector, conqueror, leader,  
a little uncanny  
version of me.

## 4.

Angelo's words stay with me  
*(They're basically your kids)*  
and come to me often,  
especially in this moment,  
holding that yellowed lined  
paper with a long list  
of names—this Aurora  
is mine—I'm helping raise her,  
I'm caring for her needs,  
she lives in my house  
and is part of my family.

This Aurora was named after  
the Borealis—mine was a princess.  
But I look upon her  
and am reminded of myself—  
    older sister  
    flute player  
    desire to play piano  
    teacher of younger siblings  
    rebellor—



*So many interests (~~like me~~)*  
*So many curiosities (~~like me~~)*

This Aurora joins  
a long list of namesakes:

Aurora Borealis  
Aurora the Sleeping Beauty  
Aurora the goddess of dawn  
Aurora the big sissy  
~~Aurora my (step)~~  
Aurora my daughter

**Letters to Melancholy**  
*By Anarosa Perez Vieyra*

My Mona Lisa Smile

Because I look down for every stone step  
where the bare ends of my walk dusts them away,  
pacing across the precarious cracks my sister made.  
A previous life where the skies were brave  
for malice and demise, when lightning struck  
through our house walls, stayed in there and died.

I talk to the throbbing wall next to our once shared bed.  
Its drywall curves I traced for one dais,  
raised smooth bump expanded and Halite cool in touch.  
I stare at plaster for ten muddled years.  
I never moved my rigid stare for thirteen more.  
Because the compact wall laid by my head  
would not change if God parted iron-nickel straight  
through Earth's heated core  
so He could meet me where I stay.

## On the Verge

My parent's grey Silverado barely fit in  
the narrow roads of Redwood Empire.  
My gleam smile and a white terrier gift  
overflow the back seats. My parents ahead,  
Cardinals with a near empty nest,  
are aimless without a fight, without a line.  
Eureka. *We have found it!* One hundred  
miles to reach the Oregon Border.  
The unforeseen effort of a startled day.  
My father gazed North, asked me the question.  
This is enough I said, we've gone in too far.  
I've been free too long.  
And the puppy is skittish.  
There is earth on my hands. And he jumps out  
of the cardboard box I set, crushing the edge with it.

## Pariah Child

The labyrinth floor is swept  
by Little Pariah shut in shame  
who is starving from waiting.

Her forlorn mirror fogs  
each crescent November,  
her window illuminates  
outside, seeking monsters  
who drain their lamb twin dry.

She copies the playmates  
that stay a whole night  
leaving twigs that will be  
buried gently outside.

Rhythms of begging,  
Sounds cut mute and frozen,  
are belongings of hers.  
nightmare gifts of beings  
that are all God.  
Lead to a quietness,  
a body she tenderly knew  
from before.

Swallowing heart, starving of want,  
She asks them of love with a drawing,  
And her winged creature fell from ash,

smear'd on the stony glare,  
poor monster.

## Moon Child

*Body of Water (np) significant accumulation of water on a planet's surface, not always still or contained*

Undrowned for years, they were my child years.  
Roaming in an upturned umbrella past yellow front doors.  
Snub neighbors gaped, but my girl body would never pull in.  
Swimming under I could not breathe, but I could not die  
by the House I laid on, my imagined playhouse.

It could not drown me.  
And yet the same waters had failed  
to carry me away to the next home,  
to the next route reaching the next land harvest moon,  
a connecting train, a big open window, and nestled still by  
indoor fire.

*Head Cover (n) something serving to cover or protect the head.*

Our Mother urged away Eve's wickedness.  
Matron assured fire would burn the temptation.  
The God in our body cannot permit the mind to flow  
like the pitch-black waves of hair growing to our waist,  
vascular systems made for our spindly cracking limbs.

Yet the thoughts came out of her precious daughters.  
They came out of my skull in fertilizers of dust and lice.  
Mornings I woke up with thicker neurotic hair  
that she combed back so tightly with a brush  
to keep the skull from shifting.

*Moon Child (n) A person affected by or born under the influence of the moon*

I was a child when I stayed by the moon  
where the gold encrusted dark found me

in midnight tryst with a blue blood martyr  
who gave for a body so strong that he could not stick  
the delectable line of my arm as I raised it to dance.

On the balanced end of my toes,  
acromion to the tip of my last finger,  
I spelled the way I could not say my name,  
this strange life, this wobbling brain on my trembling knees,  
when his skeleton embraced mine with the moon imprints on my  
skin.

# *Prose*

**Moondance**

*By Ian T. Allen*

Three o'clock couldn't come soon enough, and with it the dismissal of the last and most agonizing class of the day: Statistics. It had already been one of the hardest semesters that I'd had to date—although given that it was only my third semester that probably wasn't saying much. Even so, I was taking on a huge workload of eighteen units, all of which were outside of my major. And if you're as masochistic as I'd been and pursued a Liberal Arts Degree you know that those General Education math and science courses are usually akin to pulling nails.

Those last fifteen minutes felt like hours of medieval-style torture set to the background rhythm of humdrum lecturing. As the instructor hemmed and hawed about data analysis and probability that made my ears bleed from boredom I watched as the clock hand swung that forty-five degree angle to point its way to my freedom. I swear that I was out of the classroom, across campus, buckled in, and halfway home in the space of time that existed between the tick and tock of 2:59 PM and 3:00 PM.

One of the only things that had been getting me through those last few months was the prospect of a new video game that I had treated myself to by pre-ordering online and waiting to open until the week was out. It had been my personal incentive to finish my homework and essays earlier than I normally would have. Being a chronic procrastinator that I was, that had been a tall order. But somehow I managed. I promised to myself that I'd devote the rest of my Friday and a big chunk of Saturday to binge on it before heading out to be social with my friends.

Excitement and anticipation had been growing inside of me for the last few days to the point that they'd threatened to explode like a popped geek gasket. I probably violated more than



fifty traffic violations as I cut every conceivable corner short on my way home way out in the back-of-the-back boonies of upper Magalia.

A shit-eating grin was plastered to my face as I entered the front door that led into the living room of the converted barn that was my family's house. My dad greeted me with his usual pubescent Tarzan impersonation over the din of a CNN Breaking News Report about another dispute flaring up overseas.

"Can you believe this crap?" he asked, sighing and gesturing at the television. "If it's not a government overthrow it's a race-war. Don't know why I even bother to watch anymore. I need something lighter, like *Animal Farm* or *Schindler's List*..."

"Yeah, crazy stuff," I muttered, making my way to my room and not really paying attention as my mind was already in relaxation mode.

Before I'd made it very far down the hall, my dad called, "Hey, you wanna watch *Blade Runner* later? They're airing it on TNT tonight at six."

I hesitated, my hand resting lightly on the door of my room as I was swinging it shut behind me, mounting guilt warring with frustration. While I had already planned on gaming for the rest of the day, my dad had been cooped up alone for the last couple days since getting off of his Saturday through Monday night shifts at a hospital a few towns over. My mom had decided to take a week-long decompression vacation at one of her friend's places down near Sacramento, and my sister—being a rebellious teenager living in a small town with access to her own car—had fled and disappeared to god only knew where shortly thereafter and hadn't come back yet.

It had been just my dad and I, and with a college schedule to keep it meant that I wasn't around all that much either.

Damn it, but I'd earned my right to have some fun! To do what I wanted and have some solidarity and unwind! Anger flared and I ground my teeth before I forced myself to close my eyes, take a deep breath, and let out my rage in a sigh.

Then again, what was a couple hours? I'd most likely need to eat later, so why not multitask with a meal and a show? Besides, I figure I owed him this small courtesy, at the very least. He was probably the reason that I was such a geek in the first place, having immersed me in Science Fiction culture all my life. "Star Wars" at age 6. Co-binge watching summer marathons of "Star Trek" with me at age 8. He even made a special point to take me to the Kennedy Space Center when we visited my great aunt in the Florida Keys when we visited there, clear halfway across the state.

It might be that he was itching for some long overdue father-son time, if just for an afternoon.

"Sounds good, dad," I called back, trying not to let sour disappointment tinge my words as I closed my bedroom door the rest of the way.

In a matter of no time at all I had tossed my school stuff into a corner, turned on the miniature one-foot-by-one-foot display that was all that I could afford at the time, and was well underway into whatever the video game *Dark Souls* had to offer.

It wasn't fifteen minutes later, just after I'd finished creating my character and had figured that the game's ambient difficulty was going to make it a fun ride, when my dad's voice drifted in through the paper-thin paneling of my bedroom walls.

"Hey, bud! We need some groceries for dinner! Mind driving me down to Chico?"

I tried to pause the game only to find out that apparently wasn't an option. I watched as my character died a miserable and rather embarrassing death at the hands of one of the weaker enemies you could run into. As if to press home the point, large,

red lettering appeared on the screen, as if to state for the completely ignorant, “YOU DIED.”

“You don’t say...” I muttered under my breath, irritated more at my situation than I was at the game itself.

My dad had been in a relatively good mood when I got home, indicated by his joking sarcasm. But I knew that if I made him wait or—god forbid—I flat-out refused him it would not end well all around for me. I had long held a healthy amount of respect/fear of the man, reinforced by his once-a-choirboy-catholic and son-of-a-career-post-office-worker outlook that my father held. Constant, deferential paternal respect and all that was his due. Avoiding potential triggers was almost second nature for those that lived with him, and asking a lonely man to drive by himself to chore-duty was just asking for trouble.

Although, briefly, I wondered why he would just go on his own? Usually he wasn’t *so* needy that he needed *that* much company.

Despite this, knowing that I was tip-toeing across a minefield and that my path was already chosen for me, I answered aloud, “Sure thing, dad. Give me five minutes to finish up and get ready.”

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The drive down to Chico from upper Magalia is always a soul-rending experience. The stoplights along the way are either yellow or red, never green. You’re always stuck behind someone driving ten miles under the speed limit while another asshole—inevitably in a huge truck—is tailgating so hard they’re practically in your backseat. On top of that the sheer density of trees means that every radio signal comes in completely broken with static except for one local Country music station.

Since I’m not a masochist, I opted for classic rock CDs.

Listening to ZZ-Top, Santana, and Led Zep did wonders to abate my moodiness at having a chunk of my evening

annexed, as did my dad's comments about his suspected impotence of other motorists and his parodied singing along with whatever was playing at the time.

Twice he began one of his patented rants about my mother's hoarding habits and my sister's tendency of eating up her cellphone's data plan. I knew these would *usually* work him up into a trigger-happy mood-swing fury: raised voice, popping forehead veins, shaking fists, the works. But, *unusually* for him, he cut these topics short, right about the time he would normally start up a real head of steam.

Through all this, I kept an eye on my dashboard clock, aware that a round trip of driving would take an average of an hour-and-a-half to complete. Each minute that elapsed meant one less that I'd have to properly unwind after another hellish week of school cramming.

We were finally past the last slow-zone of Paradise where the road transitioned into a brief highway. Van Morrison's "Moondance" had started up, and for once my dad was just humming along with the rhythm of the tune instead of discordantly against it, with every now and then speaking the lyrics aloud.

“...And all the leaves on the trees are falling  
To the sound of the breezes that blow  
And I'm trying to please to the calling  
Of your heart-strings that play soft and low...”

My eyes had been locked on the road and my mirrors, looking out for any telltale signs of ticket-happy highway patrols that were known to frequent this stretch of asphalt. Like almost everyone else that's under the age of ancient and had driven Skyway for most of their lives, I was ignoring the ludicrous fifty-five MPH signs and pushing it closer to seventy. I'd be damned if I was going to waste time crawling along down a road that by

all rights should have freeway speed regulations or be waylaid by an end-of-the-month-quota cop.

“Moondance” petered out to be replaced by Steppenwolf’s “Magic Carpet Ride”, and although this was another song that he liked well enough my dad remained silent. I was so fixated on the getting from point A to point B that I almost didn’t hear him speak over the mid-volume chorus of the song. “Hey bud, um... you mind if we swing by Bruce Road Pharmacy real quick? I’m feeling a bit woozy...”

My attention didn’t waver for a second. My dad was a diabetic and randomly had problems remembering the fact. “Maybe your blood sugar’s low? We can stop at Taco Bell and grab a Chalupa or something before we hit up Winco.”

Quiet reigned for the next few minutes, broken only by the hum of the car and a kickass guitar riff.

We were coming up to the first light in Chico where the road split off onto the long stretch of fields and development plots that was Bruce Road when my dad spoke again in an unusually subdued voice. “Don’t mean to freak you out, bud, but I think it might be a pretty good idea to take me to the Pharmacy.”

I glanced over at him, wondering if this was another one of his bad jokes. Complaining about a little wooziness really wasn’t in my dad’s character. This was a man who had once slipped while sawing timber around the house and had cut his leg open with a chainsaw. Without asking for assistance he’d bound up the wound with his own shirt and drove himself to an emergency room twenty minutes away. For him to be bellyaching like this *twice* was either a put-on, a sign that he was about to start getting hangry, or...

Sweat was beading on my dad’s forehead as he breathed hard, like he’d just sprinted up a long flight of steep stairs. My resolve

wavered. My dad could put on a pretty good act if he was truly committed to a gag, but *this* was going a little far, even for him.

Hesitating, the intersection coming up, I made up my mind. “Alright, you big bearded baby,” I said in mock skepticism. “We’ll have it your way, then.”

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It didn’t take all that long to get to Bruce Road Pharmacy from Skyway, but in that time my dad’s complexion had gotten several shades paler. I wondered why he’d need to go to the outpatient clinic when I knew for a fact that he rarely went anywhere without access to an emergency diabetic kit of glucose tablets and a few spare insulin shots. There was even some in my car’s glovebox just in case. For the life of me I couldn’t figure out a reason why he’d insist on going to a hospital. Especially on his last day off of the work week as a respiratory therapist.

For a Friday, the walk-in clinic section of the pharmacy was virtually empty. We were able to get checked-in and ready without much of a hassle. The wait for the receptionist to call my dad in after he’d filled out the paperwork must have set some kind of speed record. I’d never seen *anyone* get admitted so fast.

The nurse that came to collect my dad asked me to hang out in the lobby area while they went through the routine pre-appointment physical exams. The small, cubby-like area that friends and family of the admitted was deserted and just like most other hospitals within the country: tan colored walls, overlarge photos of rolling-hill landscapes, uncomfortable foam-padded seats, and a corner mounted TV permanently set to CNN. Anderson Cooper was still prattling on about doom, death, and destruction—as always—though this one seemed to be an update of the newscast that my dad had been watching earlier.

I was starting to get the context of the report when the same nurse who had come to collect my dad entered the waiting room. In that neutral, slightly sympathetic cadence that was part

of the job for anyone working in the medical field, she asked, “Richard Allen’s son?”

Confused and caught off-guard, I replied, “If you mean *James* Richard Allen’s son, then yeah, that’s me. He doing alright back there?”

The nurse noticeably paused for a moment before continuing. “I don’t know if you heard the ambulance that left here a few minutes ago but we decided that it would be best for your father to be transferred to the Enloe Medical Center. In his condition we thought it wise for him to be in a facility that could operate if it becomes necessary.”

Numbness sent pins and needles down my spine as my brain tried to connect the meaning behind the words the nurse was saying. “Wait, wait, his *condition*? Operate? What... what the hell are you...?” and then the bottom dropped out of my stomach. Fear settled heavily upon my shoulders and dug in cold talons. I felt my eyes go wide as I garbled out nonsense sounds.

The nurse fixed me with that neutral, even, sympathetic expression and stated, “Your father was having a heart attack.”

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For the second time that day I drove like a goddamn maniac. Though I’d lived in the surrounding area for over twenty-one years Chico was still a labyrinth of seemingly randomized streets. I managed to actually catch up to the ambulance before it made it more than a few blocks away from the Clinic and stayed glued to its bumper, convinced that if I lost sight of it I’d never be able to find Enloe.

As I drove I tried to call my mom to tell her what was going on. As usual her phone was off or dead or accidentally left behind at home and it went straight to voicemail. After leaving a message probably too incoherent to be understandable I tried my sister’s phone next. I got much the same result only to remember that she routinely screened my calls out of sheer sibling spite.

She hardly, if ever, checked the messages I left, but I made an effort all the same. “Hey Sarah, this is E. Calling to tell you that dad’s at Enloe hospital. Call me ASAP, alright? Love you.”

Further anxiety supplemented that which already existed for me. I didn’t hold out high hopes that either of them would be getting back to me any time soon. Both had a habit of never checking their phones, *especially* my sister when it was something from me. I was on my own.

An eternity later—though it must have been only a few minutes—we arrived at the hospital, situated in the dead center of town. The emergency vehicle that until then I had been shadowing was allowed special access into an unloading bay, but I was forced to find parking elsewhere. Unlike Bruce Road, Enloe was packed to bursting with patients: a common occurrence my parents had complained about that happened almost every Friday.

It took me fifteen minutes to find parking, but next to no time at all to sprint to the emergency room front doors with all the adrenaline that was surging like a lightning storm through my veins. As made evident by outside parking, the ER admittance area was a sea of bodies, most either sick, injured, or high on something that made them think they were. It took me another five minutes to get past the check-in line, where I was greeted by a disheveled, harassed looking clerk that looked like he was running off of stimulants and two hours of sleep.

“I’m looking for James Allen,” I panted between gasps, still catching my breath. “He was brought here by ambulance a few minutes ago from Bruce Road.”

The clerk looked at me in supreme annoyance. With what appeared like a huge amount of effort on his part swiveled his chair to look at a handwritten chart of chicken-scratch behind him. “Cardiac incident. Potential surgery needed. Bumped to surgery prep ward due to ER being full. You family?”



“I’m his son,” I said, too frazzled to take offence at the man’s condescending tone.

After verifying this with my ID the clerk nodded to a set of double doors to the side of the admittance counter desk. “Through there, a ways down the hall to the left. Staff’s too busy to hold your hand so you’ll have to find him yourself.”

A thanks was almost out of my mouth when the clerk yelled, “Next!” to the person behind me in line.

I hurried through the doors the clerk had indicated and soon found myself in a long hall that was somehow familiar to me. Many times in the past I’d visited the hospitals where my parents worked, finding myself walking down corridors much like the one I was suddenly faced with. I started left as the clerk had suggested, my every hurried step echoing and magnified as I passed door after door after door.

Worry that I had passed where they were keeping my dad started to gnaw at my mind as the minutes dragged by and I still hadn’t found him. I was passed by several staff and doctors as they hurried this way and that, but none of the ones that stopped when I asked for help knew where to point me.

Directionless, I kept going the way that I had started, hoping against hope that there would be a sign that would give me a hint as to where my dad would be.

Around that time another thought, far darker than any that had plagued me up until that point, clawed its way into the forefront of my mind. *What if he dies before I can find him?*

The guilt and dread I felt at that moment were debilitating, forcing me to bite back a sudden impulse to start screaming out my dad’s name at the top of my lungs in desperation. *Don’t you dare fucking panic! Not now and not here. You’re short on time but not that short. Use that brick between your ears and think goddamn it!*

Taking a few, slow lungfuls of air to calm myself down it took me a few moments to register what my ears were hearing. It was a sound so out of place and disjointed with my situation at the time that at first I was convinced that I was hallucinating.

Singing?

I followed the rhythmic tune further down the stretch of hallway, beginning to make out the words that were being raised. I sped up my pace as I recognized both the song, the lyrics, and the voice that was producing them all at once.

“Well, it's a marvelous night for a moondance  
With the stars up above in your eyes  
A fantabulous night to make romance  
'Neath the cover of October skies...”

My hurried footsteps carried me to a door that was slightly ajar at the very end of the hallway leading into a squared room lit by a softer, more yellowed light. The place had been sectioned off into smaller cubicles by way of white drawback curtains, each housing a single, movable hospital bed, a monitoring unit, and a tall steel pole from which an intravenous drip could be hung.

My dad was in one of these, his bed raised to a legs elevated sitting position and an IV tube leading to the crook of his arm. A few nurses were gathered around him, checking his monitor reading and making sure that he was feeling comfortable. Between raucous choruses where he'd repeat those first few lines or mimic the odd shiver-humming that Van Morrison had thrown into the song my dad would answer them. He had a look of sleepy contentment on his face and from that I could tell that he'd been drugged up pretty thoroughly.

After I approached and introduced myself, the nurses filled me in on what was going on. They explained that the EMTs that had been in the ambulance with my dad had found a high concentration of enzyme levels within his blood, indicating

an in-progress heart attack. They had given him a steady dosage of morphine in order to dilate his blood vessels and prevent the ones around his heart from clogging, which clarified for me what the IV was for. He had also been scheduled for surgery within the next hour as the exact level of enzymes in his system was very likely caused by at least three of the arteries around his heart were struggling to circulate blood.

Once they were sure that I understood the nurses drifted off to give my dad and me a modicum of privacy.

When he saw me my dad's face split into a wide, toothy grin. "Thought I lost you, back there!" he spoke, his words with a roundness to them as if he were drunk. "By the way, bud, I talked you up to that cute redhead. You should ask her out!"

I didn't know whether to laugh or sob. "Wingman extraordinaire as always, eh dad? But, seriously, you do realize what's going on, right? You're about to go into surgery. Do you... do you want to... talk about it... or..." My voice hitched and I felt pressure building up behind my eyes, causing me to stop talking. I couldn't cry. Not then. That was the last thing my dad needed.

He looked me square in the eyes and I felt the surety, strength, and calmness that only a parent can give off to their child as he patted my arm. "Don't worry about your old man. I don't plan on cashing out quite yet. Bright side of this is now I have an excuse to take some time off work! But, seriously bud, don't you worry. I'm gonna get through this fine. And you will too."

A few minutes later, after my dad got me to start singing "Moondance" with him while he over-embellished the romance lines and practically serenaded the medical staff, a few teal-clad orderlies appeared to say that the surgery room was ready. They trundled him off in short order, and when I asked if I could be there for him one of the nurses informed me that my presence

would put him at high risk of infection which could prove fatal. She then said that there was also a mandatory twelve hour “sterilize period” where no one but medical personnel would be permitted to come into contact with him. She advised that I return home and wait for them to give me a call when the surgery was through and when I could return to visit him.

The last thing I heard from my dad before he left the surgery ward was him singing under his breath,

“Can I just have one more moon dance with you, my love  
Can I just make some more romance with you, my  
love...”

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The next fourteen hours went by in agonizing, blurred slow motion for me. The drive home was quiet as a tomb, the radio muted so that I could better torture myself within the prison of my own head, spinning out dark possibilities and dire outcomes that were each progressively worse than the next.

When I got home I tried and failed again to get ahold of my mother and my sister, only to get the same straight-to-voicemail turnout as last time. The phone’s plastic creaked in my hand under my mounting rage as I replaced it on the receiver. I tried and failed to simply go to sleep in order to pass the time all the more quickly, but ended up tossing and turning and sweating. I tried and failed to wear myself down by playing the video game that I had, until just a few hours ago, been so excited to play, only to find that my reflexes were so sluggish and sloppy that I made even less progress than I did before.

After giving everything up I decided to resort to an old fallback that I hadn’t used since middle school: lying down on the bathroom floor with the fan on while listening to a sink running. When all else fails, regardless of how strange it sounds, doing that simple routine for a always grounds me back in reality. Don’t ask me why it works, it just does.

While I was lying there, the coolness of the tile soothing the tension knots of my back, my eyes closed against the soft glow of the overhead light to better hear the meditative, thrumming oscillation of the fan, my mind went over the last few hours. I thought of how, despite my dad's state in the hospital, he had made sure that *I* was doing alright. There he was, with his body betraying him, helpless to stop it, and he was worrying more about how *I* was handling it.

I had never once considered just how much my dad had put the needs of his children before his own. Sure, sometimes he could be a scary guy, unapproachable when he was feeling moody or ticked off about life in general. But more often than not he'd find a way to make light of his situation with a joke or by finding a silver lining. What's more, he'd never allow himself to show any kind of weakness, as that might make people worry about him. Which was something he could never abide.

He was a man—a mortal man, like everyone else—who was trying to make the best out of what life had given him.

I must have fallen into a mini-coma at some point because I was startled awake by the earsplitting ring of the cordless phone I had mindlessly brought into the bathroom with me. In my near-fugue state it took me a couple seconds to figure out how to answer the damn thing.

The flat, matter of fact statements of a medical clerk cleared my head faster than if someone had splashed me with a cold bucket of water. From the sound of his voice I thought it might have been the same flustered, sleep deprived ER attendant that had been so short with me yesterday. He said that the surgery went well, that it ended up being a triple bypass, that he had been put under in order to speed and ease his recovery, and that I could visit around noon—about two hours from then.

Blearily, I noticed that neither my mother nor sister had left any messages, nor did they answer again when I tried

another fruitless attempt at contacting them. At that point I was too tired to care. Without taking a shower or changing my clothes I jumped in my car and headed straight down to Enloe, taking my time and driving like the majority of retirees that frequented the road. Parking around the hospital was much easier now that the “rush” was over, as was talking with the admittance clerks to find out where they were keeping my dad.

He had been placed in a quiet and private wing where passing doctors and medical staff could keep an eye on him while he slept off whatever they had used to put him under.

The first thing that I noticed when entering that room was his exposed chest. A raw, red line about an inch thick ran from the center of his collarbone down to a spot just beneath his ribs where it split in two thinner diagonals that led down his sides. I then saw the large, brightly shining steel staples that formed a criss-crossed pattern overlaid this, reminding me of a macabre zipper that might be found in a Tim Burton film. Last I noticed all the wired pads covering the majority of his exposed skin, feeding bio-information to a monitor that displayed information readouts that I couldn't begin to understand except for that universally-known peak-and-valley pattern that was my dad's heartbeat.

I don't know if it was my presence that roused him or it was just coincidence that the drugs happened to wear off, but just a few minutes after I'd entered the room my dad began to stir. His breathing came harder than normal, his lungs struggling to work against the necessary damage that had been done to his chest so that the surgeons could get to his heart. It seemed a great effort for him to open his eyes, and when he did they were unfocused as they tried to rest in my general direction.

Despite his obvious pain, despite his shortness of breath, despite the fact that he could have no idea how his own surgery

had actually gone, he whispered in a ragged, harsh rasp, “Hey bud. You look terrible.”

My laugh had just enough sleep-deprived hysteria behind it to offset the sob that lurked at the back of my throat.

I spent the half day it took my mom and sister to finally show up sitting beside my dad’s hospital bed, talking Star Trek with him when he was awake and enjoying his company when the drugs kicked in and forced him back to sleep. They happened to showed up during one of these naps, which probably made his condition seem far worse than it was. Which to me was a small, petty justice after all the crap they’d unwittingly forced me to do solo.

Once I’d assured them that dad was out of the worst part of the woods now that the surgery was done I quietly retold the events of the last 24 hours. Watching the play of emotions on their faces was surreal, and I soon lost any vestiges of anger that I might’ve been harboring. After all, I had fresh firsthand experience of what it felt like to be blindsided with the reality that even someone whom you thought was bullet proof is in fact just as human as you were.

**Human**

*By Charlotte Letellier*

You pull your coat around you tighter. It's going to be a cold night.

There are still a few people out roaming. The rain chased most people indoors, but now that it's faded into mist, people are scurrying home or heading out to dinner or bars, closed umbrellas in hand.

You notice that almost no one is alone.

There's a young couple with bright smiles and big laughs. The man is wearing only a shirt, his coat wrapped around the woman. He doesn't look cold. Not with all the warmth he's looking at her with. She's telling him some kind of story, her hands moving theatrically. He puts his arm around her.

There's a mom and her teenage daughter. The mom looks sad, a little hesitant. She keeps glancing over at her daughter, opening her mouth like she's about to say something and then holding it back. The daughter is staring at the ground as she walks, her hands shoved in her pockets. They turn a corner and vanish.

There's a group of college students, already a little tipsy, laughing loudly and leaning on one another. A girl slips her arm around the waist of another girl, pulling her close and kissing her cheek.

It isn't these people that make you feel lonely. It's the people who are alone, walking briskly and avoiding eye contact. The people who are with others at least seem happy while they ignore you. The people that are alone, in their business suits or their hoodies, they seem to angle their faces away from you.



People forget you're human. As though a crucial part of being human is consistently sleeping in the same place, under the same roof, surrounded by the same things. Your humanity is stripped. You must've left it in your apartment before you were evicted.

People don't see you because they don't want to. They don't want to think you exist. It makes them sad. You wish you didn't understand this. You'd rather feel angry or hurt, but really, you just have a sort of resigned acceptance about the whole matter.

You have a cup in front of you, just in case someone takes pity on you and drops a dollar in. You've stopped asking. People just walk faster away, like they're afraid to look at you. Like homelessness is contagious, or like you'll mug them if they make eye contact. Maybe they're avoiding their guilt. You don't know. You're too tired to figure it out.

The sun has been down for a couple hours now. The crowd is thinning.

It's going to be a cold night.

You should get to the shelter three blocks down. On nights like this, they rarely have beds open, but on nights like this, they tend to not turn people away. They'll let you sleep on the floor right inside, so you're out of the cold at least.

Or you should get to the library before it closes. If you hide in a corner, they might not see you. Or the nice librarian who's there most days will turn the other way and let you sleep.

You should call the one sibling that still talks to you. Well, he doesn't talk to you. But he picks up when you call, and he won't hang up on you. On a night like this, he might let you take his couch. Like he used to. He'll just make sure to remind

you that you can only stay one night. No longer than that. You'll have to find someplace else after.

You might have enough money stashed in your pocket for one night at the cheap motel downtown. It's grimy, and has the option of charging by the hour, but they have heating and blankets. You could take a hot shower. You could sleep on a mattress.

But then how would you eat tomorrow, if you spend all your money now?

And if you call your brother, how will you be able to swallow your pride and ask for help from him yet again? After all he's done for you? Can you afford to burn that bridge, too, by asking too much? You can hear his disappointed tone ringing in your ears already. How could you let it get this desperate? He asks you. And you don't have an answer.

And do you really want to risk getting the kind librarian in trouble? What if she loses her job on your account? Are you worth that risk? You can see her absence. She'll be missed. Won't she? You don't know that you would be missed.

And doesn't the shelter have enough problems, with all the overcrowding and the drug addicts and the gay teenagers, kicked out by their parents? Don't those people need shelter more than you do? You're the last person who should need that kind of assistance. Who are you to try and take it? You'd take a spot from someone else. Someone deserving. Someone worthy of help.

You can sleep in the alley again. No one bothers you there. Or you could go down to the bay and sleep under the docks. No one sees you there.

A young woman glances at you as she's walking. She looks afraid. She speeds up. You don't blame her. After all, how human are you now?

They forget. They forget that you still have feelings, that you had a past. Once you're living on the streets, people think you just came into existence this way. That you never went to school. That you never had a job. That you never had a home.

They don't know that you used to play piano beautifully. They don't know that your dog died last month.

It doesn't matter. You don't think they'd care anyway.

You'll sleep on the cardboard in the alley again. You'll be fine.

But it's going to be a cold night.

**Half Past Seven**  
*By Charlotte Letellier*

*How long have you been here?*

You check the clock. Half past seven.

You don't remember when you got here.

You don't quite know where *here* is.

There's something to be said for the surreal unease of fluorescent lights, the jarring lack of organization making you wonder if you're going in circles. What did you come here to get anyway?

The aisles get longer. The other people get more scarce. The lights flicker. What are you doing here?

You're not sure. You're never sure. This happens sometimes. You're not immensely concerned. Rather, you feel a distant kind of calm, a comfort in the familiarity of your own confusion.

Have you seen your family today?

You can't remember.

Memory is a strange thing—sometimes you notice yourself forming new memories, can feel the images filing themselves away in your mind. Other times, you lose chunks of time. Hours, days. You can never be certain. It's not exactly something you can ask anyone.

How did you get here? Did you drive? Did you walk? Did you come here with anyone?

You feel like there was someone with you when you first arrived. But you can't remember going through the door. You're

no longer sure where the door is. You accept your fate of never being able to exit this brightly lit, uncomfortably empty store.

Something seems wrong, but you can't put your finger on it. You can't bring yourself to care enough to focus on that feeling.

You check the clock. Half past seven. How has no time passed?

What day of the week is it?

You check.

You forget the second you put your phone back in your pocket. Maybe you didn't actually check.

What's missing here?

Quick, think. Are you remembering to breathe? Have you eaten today? Have you called your mother? You don't know the answers to any of these questions.

You don't know the answers to much of anything.

You don't know much of anything at all.

Maybe you've died. Maybe the afterlife is much more boring than everyone had hoped. Maybe this is the fate that was given to you. Do you deserve it? It doesn't seem like hell. More like purgatory. Some suspended state where nothing is real.

You're not sure if you'd get into heaven. You're not sure if you deserve to go to hell. Maybe this does seem right.

Then again, maybe you're still alive. Maybe this is a dream. It could be. Couldn't it? The air seems hazy. Maybe that's just you. Did you remember your glasses?

Do you wear glasses?

Maybe this is another one of those episodes you used to have in adolescence.

Wait, grab that thought. That's something concrete. There must be a memory attached to that thought. Some clue.

The second you reach for the thought, it vanishes.

This aisle seems wrong. Why would the candles be next to the paper towels? You stare vacantly at the candles. Maybe they're seasonal. That could tell you what time of year it is at least. You can't seem to make yourself register the colors or the names.

You could *find the door*.

Well. You could try.

You check the clock again. Half past seven.

Maybe your watch is broken. Or time has stopped.

How did you get here again?

**Our Chili***By Megan Mann**3 cans pinto beans, drained and rinsed**2, 8 oz cans of tomato sauce**8 oz of water**1/3 c chopped onions (can substitute dried onions, but use less)**1/4 t salt**1/4 t pepper**1 1/2 t flour (to thicken)**1/4-1/2 t chili powder (to taste)**1/2 t season salt**1/4 t sugar**1/4 t ground cumin**1/2 t chicken bouillon granules (make sure there is no MSG; you can find this at Winco Foods)**1/4 t basil, optional**1/2-1 lb hamburger meat*

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On cold fall or winter days, Grandma Mary would make her chili. I remember her making it in her old olive green and cream slow cooker, but the recipe I have is one for the stovetop. Regardless, like her stew, her chili always marked the turn in the weather, much like the grass in the field beginning to grow back, or the hummingbirds coming around less and less. During those cooler months, it was nice to have a warm bowl of comfort in the evenings, especially since the house grew colder as the day waxed into night and the heat from the heater was stuck in “dining room,” the center of the house.

Grandma’s house was one of those kinds that had been pieced together over the many decades of its existence. From the rooms in the front of what the house is now, it’s difficult to tell what was the original house and what had been added on (and when), but I know for sure that the kitchen, spare room, and

bathroom were added on much later. Oh, you can't tell from looking at the front, left side, or even the back of the house. But if you walk around to the side yard between the house and the barn, where the white grapevine and oleander trees grow unchecked, and look up to the roof, the drastically different pitches seem to shout in their steepness and light gray shingles. I imagine trying to climb from the kitchen roof to the dining room roof is like being on a tall mountain, and fixing the roof has proved to be a difficult task because of this mismatch of steepness.

If the patchwork nature of the house is any indication of its age, it's also a clear admittance that the house did not have central heating or air in the traditional sense. The gas heater and swamp cooler were in the dining room, and neither the cool or hot air seemed to make it very far past there, even though the living room and Mom's/my room were connected directly to it. And the spare room off the kitchen? Forget about it. It became close to freezing in the winter and boiling in the summer, so it was rarely used for anything but storage and being the connecting hallway between the kitchen and the bathroom. I think I can count the number of times Grandma slept in the bed in the spare room during my lifetime on both my hands. Instead, she slept on the couch in the living room, and I'm not talking about a pull-out sofa bed.

In hindsight, I feel bad that Grandma slept on the couch while Mom and I lived there. When we moved into Spencer's house shortly before Mom's wedding, Grandma immediately moved into the bed that used to be Mom's in the main bedroom. If I could go back, I like to think that I'd give up my own bed in Mom's and my bedroom so that Grandma could've had a real bed to sleep in all year, but I think Mom might've had an objection to sleeping in the same bed as a daughter who was far bigger than she was before she was even out of middle school.



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*(\*Megan's Note: I also add a healthy sprinkling of packaged chili seasoning mix to the chili)*

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The only time prior to us moving that I can recall Grandma sleeping in the main bedroom was after her quadruple bypass surgery. I'm not sure how old I was at the time, but I do recall being dropped off at my Aunt Lorraine and Uncle Jerry's house the night before. When Grandma came home from the hospital, she slept in my bed amidst "Pinkie the cat" bedding from Mervyn's and bubble gum pink walls. It was easier for her to get out of my twin-sized bed than the couch, and it was closer to Mom's bed so that she could keep a better eye on her. Being so young, I didn't really comprehend what had happened or the magnitude of Grandma's surgery, but I did know that she was in pain and that I wanted her to get better, so I was more than willing to give up my bed.

A physical therapist/nurse would come out to help Grandma with recovery and to check her staples. Somehow I caught a glimpse of them one day and the image will forever be seared into my mind: Grandma sitting on the bed with her pink plaid, flannel pajama top unbuttoned. The staples shone silver against the black red brown of dried blood and the shiny, puckered pink skin that was trying to heal around them mixed with the furious redness of the irritated areas where the staples disappeared into her body. Later, this incision would evolve into a thick, long caterpillar of a scar, with the slashes where the staples had been standing in for its legs. I had seen this type of wound and later the scar in some of the crime, medical, and soap operas that Grandma and I used to watch together, but that was all fake, an illusion. The gash that invaded my grandma's chest was all too real, and later, when I had surgery of my own to

remove a cyst, I could clearly imagine the pain she must've been in.

But, Grandma Mary was the type of woman that couldn't be knocked down easily, and when she was she didn't stay knocked down for long. A few months later she was back in the yard, watering the plants and making sugar water for the hummingbirds, and she had started her visiting rounds with our nearby relatives again. And as soon as she could, she moved back onto the couch, even though we insisted that she stay in my bed for just a little while longer.

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*Directions: In a colander, drain and rinse the pinto beans, then set aside. Mix the dry seasonings with the tomato sauce and water and whisk together (you can use a fork). Cook hamburger and the onions until there is no pink showing in the meat, then drain.*

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When my mother was two and my aunt only a couple of months old, my grandpa died by falling off of a ladder while working on a piece of equipment on another man's farm. He left Grandma Mary a widow, a single mother, and absolutely heartbroken. She never talked about him because even decades later the pain was still a fresh, open wound. He was the love of her life. After his death, Grandma grieved, leaning on the support of her family and taking advantage of the money she got from his social security and the V.A. (he had served in the Korean War) so that she could provide for her girls despite feeling like she couldn't go on.

But she did go on. After all, Grandma Mary had two daughters to raise and a house and five acres of land to maintain, so she picked herself up out of her misery and did what she had to do to make ends meet. It wasn't like she wasn't a stranger to hard times; she had been born during the Great Depression to a

farming family, the oldest of her four other brothers and sister, so she knew how to pave her way through hardship. She worked the tomatoes and helped out her dad on his ranch, she scrimped and saved every penny and found uses for things that you'd never think of, like using can lids to temporarily fix holes in a roof or walls. She used everything until it was completely unusable, and only threw stuff away or burned it when it absolutely couldn't be fixed or repurposed. Duct tape was her tool of choice, and she firmly believed that it could fix anything. Wallet breaking? Duct tape and staples. Belt cracked? Duct tape. Hole in the plastic sheet that covered the windows in the covered side porch turned laundry room? Duct tape.

She learned how to make amazing meals from cans and bags, and even if she struggled, even if it was hard, she never blinked an eye or let her kids (or me) feel like times were tough.

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*Return the hamburger and onion mixture to the pan; add the beans. Stir in the tomato sauce and seasoning mixture to the hamburger, onions, and beans, then heat to a light boil.*

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When the weather gets cold, I think of Grandma's chili. As a kid, I was very picky and would only eat the beans, leaving the meat behind and ignored. I did this with stew too, but only ate the meat and left the vegetables. I have no explanation for this aversion; it must've been a kid thing because I now eat everything in the stew and chili, no moving hamburger meat around to find the last pinto bean anymore.

But it wasn't until I was beginning my graduate program that I emailed Mom and asked for Grandma's recipe. I had been living with my own kitchen for years, but the stress and unfamiliarity that came with the transition from being an undergraduate to a graduate student made me crave the familiar, the comforting. By this time, Grandma had been gone for a little

over eight years and I hadn't really had her chili since then. There had been Spencer's chili, sure, but except for a single pot Mom made sometime when I was in high school, it wasn't the same. So, I made my first attempt at Grandma Mary's Chili one November afternoon . . . and failed miserably. "Miserably" may be too strong of a word as it was still decent chili, but I got tomato sauce and hamburger grease all over my kitchen (I didn't have a jar to drain it into so I used foil that I shaped into a bowl. I don't recommend this method) and the chili was more tomato soup with beans and hamburger than "chili."

My second attempt came after I got my cast iron dutch oven for Christmas. That time I added more of the packaged chili seasoning mix because I still hadn't bought the individual spices (as spices are expensive), and it tasted much better but just wasn't the same. No, it wasn't until this last time, when Mom finally bought me the spices after I was complaining about my wimpy chili, that it really tasted like Grandma's. But even then, something was missing. While her recipe doesn't call for packaged chili spice mix, I had some so I sprinkled a little on top of the simmering bean, tomato, onion, and hamburger mixture, then stirred it in. *Now* it tasted like Grandma's chili. Each time I had a bowl, I felt like I was back in her house, the cold winter air nipping at my sock-clad feet and nose. We would eat by the light of the ceiling fan, with its fake, plastic crystal-tipped cords dangling in the middle of the table making small circles as the fan made futile attempts to pull down and distribute the little heat from the heater into the room. They were bowls of reminiscence, of comfort, and they helped to ease the stress of the semester, just like if she were here and I could call her for the same thing.

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*Reduce the heat and simmer uncovered for 30 minutes to 1 hour.*

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The transition from being an undergraduate to graduate student for me was like being slapped in the face. I began my Master's the semester after I received my bachelor's degree at the same school. I was months shy of my twenty-second birthday and was one of the first in my family to pursue this type of education, so I went in completely blind. I quickly found myself overwhelmed by the vastly different climate of my graduate coursework, even though I had most of the same professors I had had during my time as an undergraduate. The courses were harder, the papers longer, and much more was expected from me. Coupled with debilitating chronic migraines that put me in the ER during my first finals week as a graduate student, I remember thinking that I couldn't do it, that I was completely disillusioned to think that graduate school was the right place for me. My imposter syndrome nearly got the best of me.

But I made myself a bowl of chili, I buckled down on my dreams and ambitions, and I reminded myself that anything can be done with enough hard work, dedication, and resilience. After all, if my Grandma Mary could raise two daughters practically on her own after losing her soulmate, maintain five acres of land, then help raise her granddaughter and visit her family almost every week, why couldn't I get a Master's degree? Grandma Mary was a strong woman, and she didn't raise the women in her family to not be the same way.

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*\*Megan's Note: If you are using dried beans, be sure to pick out the dirt clots and rocks, then soak and rinse them well in order to clean them.*

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Most of the time, Grandma would make her chili with dried beans instead of canned. At certain stores, like Walmart, Grocery Outlet, or even Food for Less, you can get a bag of dried beans cheaper than you can canned beans for the same

quantity. It may be more work in the long run to pick out the rocks and dirt clots, then soak them, rinse them, and repeat three times to get out all the dirt in comparison to just opening two cans with an electric can opener, but every little penny counts when you're on a budget.

Each time I've attempted to make Grandma's chili I have used canned beans instead of dried. While I'm also on a budget like Grandma was, I've found I don't have the time nor the patience to wash dried beans properly, and I'm usually too hungry after smelling the chili while it's been cooking to wait for it to simmer for an hour so that the beans can get soft. Along with the beans, I don't use dried basil in my chili since I'm allergic to it. Really, this omittance of an ingredient is typical of Grandma's chili. The reason why basil is listed as "optional" in her recipe is because dried herbs and spices are expensive, so if we couldn't afford some spice or herb, it didn't go in the pot and she would add other stuff to compensate for its absence. No two pots of chili were the same ingredients-wise, yet it always tasted the same, which is a statement that can be recycled for everything Grandma made, save for her pie crust and rosquillos since baking's a science and omitting or short changing any ingredient ruins a pie or a cookie immediately. This is unequivocally why I've had such a hard time pinning down the correct way to make Grandma's chili so that it'll taste like she used to make it. While this "little bit of this, little bit of that" way of cooking made for an impressive talent since she could always make the chili taste the same as the pot before, it proves to be a difficult and frustrating thing when you're trying to recreate something as simple as a bowl of chili.

See, while Grandma and Mom are of the "little bit of this, little bit of that" school of thought, I am the type of person who follows the recipe mostly to a T. Have I substituted things in the past when instructions were maybe not so clear or were

missing? Yes I have. But I usually look at other recipes of the same thing I'm making to find a way to supplement the original recipe rather than experiment on my own and potentially ruin my dinner. To put it bluntly, I'm not one for experimentation in the kitchen, which in retrospect bleeds into other aspects of my life. During my undergrad, I found myself frustrated when given the freedom to choose my own paper topics for large term papers, but flourished when given specific instructions on what to write about and what was expected to be included in the paper. When it came to poetry, I preferred form over free-verse--sure, form may be harder, but at least there were guidelines that I had to follow instead of just stringing words, sounds, and images together and hoping that it all translated on the page.

This need for instruction and aversion to the freedom of experimentation is ironic considering that I prefer free prose over all other creative forms. There's something about being able to let the words flow over the page and let them lead you to places you never thought of going before that is so compelling to me. The freedom of choosing to spend a page on an image or to leave little breadcrumbs of metaphoric significance for readers over an entire novel beckons and appeals to the "little bit of this, little bit of that" side of me that I inherited from Grandma and Mom. Prose is my pot of chili, and I love experimenting with different ingredients to see what I can create.

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*\*Megan's note: cook for thirty minutes for canned beans, an hour for dried.*

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On cold Saturday mornings, I would climb onto and lay next to Grandma on the couch while I was waiting for the cartoons to come on. I'd have the TV on ABC with the volume down low as the same travel advertisement for Fort Bragg and Mendocino played on a continuous loop, Grandma's snoring

giving the show some background music as she slept. Sometimes I'd fall asleep there, all warm under the blankets, next to her while the sun started to peak over the horizon that was the top of the trees behind our neighbor's house, the roosters beginning to crow somewhere in the blocks of our town. Even when I got too big to fit on the couch with her, she still saved a spot for me on those mornings, just like she'd lay a blanket out for me in front of the heater on weekdays so I could warm my feet before school, the rest of the house freezing in the black winter mornings. With my feet stuck as close as I could bear to have them next to the vent underneath the heater and my head resting between the legs of my chair at the dinner table, I'm sure I hogged all the hot air and kept the house from heating up even the little that it would, but she would still lay out that blanket for me every morning before she started making breakfast.

My apartment has real central heating and air, so there's no more cozying up next to the gas-powered heater in the wintertime to try to get warm in the mornings, nor do I have to make sure I have all the blankets on my bed, plus flannel pajamas and a long sleeve shirt in order to not feel like I'm going to become a Megan-cicle at night. However, when the weather starts to change and the cold air begins to knock at my bedroom window, I make Grandma's chili to warm up, even if my heater will kick on at any second and heat my entire apartment in less than five minutes. As I make more batches of it, I take a page out of her book and add a little bit of this, a little bit of that to make the mixture of tomatoes, meat, onion, and beans taste just like hers, scribbling slightly illegible notes on my paper copy for reference the next time I make it.

Like a prose piece I've been working on, I want my chili to be just right, even if this time I'd like it a little spicier than usual.

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*\*Megan's Note: This chili goes great with Jiffy corn muffins served with a liberal smear of butter.*

**Ever-Growing**  
*By Allie Mueiting*

“Let’s go out this way,” Mom urged, pointing to the front door, not out of fear, but of habit. She carried these Greek superstitions—leaving out the same door in which she entered, and the other way around—because of her father’s heritage. Her mother however, instilled a logical, and dare I say cynical view of the world, resulting in her doing and not thinking about these practices.

My father used to roll his eyes at these habits.

He thought these actions illogical, foolish even, and she found his ignorance to others’ upbringings the same. After twenty-three years, she found the strength to put her needs first, his senseless, backhanded remarks finally too much, and told him to move out. She would never wish ill upon him, however. To think negatively curses both parties—one with the desired outcome, and the other with guilt. So, she stays kind and patient to all.

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Now, in her very own home, a beautiful, Spanish-influenced, suburban house in a gated Southern California community at the foothills of dusty mountains, she plants flowers. Most of the yard gets considerable sunlight, and she nourishes the fauna that requires constant warmth and sunshine. We garden together, laughing about the ants that crawl on our arms and the wiggling pill bugs that find themselves on the patio, while we are elbow deep in the Earth. Bees find their way to our treasures, sharing in the beauty, and cherishing their gift of nectar. When my siblings and I had been given the chore of gardening with our father, we had lived in Illinois, and planting season was frigid and the ground was hard. Then, Mom knew better than to offer her help, and she stayed inside—he told us

she wasn't good at gardening, in fact no one knew how to garden to his specifications.

She's lived in her house for about three years now. Young lemon trees bloomed on the side wall, still short and bulking up, but bearing fruit nonetheless. Flowers in orange and yellow and white and pink kept our little orchard company when we couldn't. Sprawling, green groundcover flooded the corners and elevated areas of the backyard, and began creeping up the wall.

"I heard that rose bushes are harder to maintain," She breathed while handling the young, twiggy beginnings of the plant, "but we'll give it a shot." She winked. Her optimism and thirst for adventure were new to me, but I could feel that it was natural for her. The qualities must've been buried—just needed nourishment.

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Three weeks later, while back at school, I would receive a text message with a picture of a lush, rose-clad bush with the accompanying message, "the bush we planted bloomed!!" It was still skinny and developing, but clearly loved.

## **10 Tips from My Frist Semester of College**

*By Amber Tovar*

1. Don't catch feelings for the boy you met at the frat party because a month later you'll realize his constant need to be fucked up will get in the way of your relationship. Don't take it personal and don't blame yourself for thinking you can deal with the inconsistency by relating to the way he copes - swallowing your issues during the week and burping them back up only to hold them in your mouth and exhale them in the smoke on a Friday night is not going to make the feeling of suffocating and tears you hold back on a Tuesday night go away.

2. Understand that some boys are going to want you only for your body and you are going to want some boys for theirs and that is just how it works, but don't let the sweet nothings they whisper in your ear and the way they hold you at 2 am lead you to believe that they want more. Don't let these boys make you feel stupid, make them understand that you are a woman with galaxies sprouting up inside you every waking moment and that the force you hold between your legs contains the power to create something more than just good memories.

3. Talk to the people you live with. Get to know them and how they want their tea and how the thought of the room getting too messy makes the hairs on their arms stick up in anxiety. Understand that there are dimensions in these people and that they lay awake with the same exact insecurities that you have - Do they think I'm annoying? Do they hate me? Are they also swimming for their lives in the middle of the ocean, desperately seeking human connection in the vastness they're trapped in?

4. Appreciate the little things. Appreciate the extra 15 minutes of sleep you get on Tuesday and Thursdays. Appreciate when your

roommate makes you tea because you were up all night coughing. Appreciate when your best friend calls you on her way to class because she knew she wasn't going to have any time that day to talk to you, but she had to hear your voice. Appreciate the socks your mom sends you. Appreciate the little dust particles floating around in the sunlight while you lay alone in your room after taking a nap. Appreciate when your phone dies. Appreciate when the bus schedule gets messed up or when you have to confront your roommate about an issue. Appreciate extended deadlines and cancelled classes. In one way or another, all of these things will be learning experiences and you must appreciate them for that reason.

5. You are going to miss home so much. It might not be the place, it might be a person or a smoke spot or the kitchen table, but don't let this homesickness chain your body to your bed. Don't let the homesickness take your appetite down the garbage disposal and don't let the wind that comes when the leaves begin to fall take away the curiosity you had about the world when you first got to college. Fight like hell against the homesickness and tell your family and friends you love and miss them everyday if you have to, but remember that you are on your own path now and you'll move mountains if you let yourself. Thanksgiving break comes faster than you think.

6. Get over the fact that you are going to look like a freshman because guess what? You are one. Get organized before the semester starts. Read the syllabus' and take notes on them. Know where your class is at and know your professor's names. Don't be afraid to go to office hours or raise your hand in class. Don't let the stereotype of "looking like a freshman" daunt you into not asking for help because you'll look even more like a freshman if

you allow something as insignificant as a label keep you from getting your shit together in the first semester.

7. Understand that people will be scared of you. People are scared of someone who knows who they are (for the most part at eighteen) and they will flee from their feelings when it gets too real. When they tell you you are different from the other boys while you hold each other in her dorm room after the rave yet ignores you when she walks past you in the dining hall, you will realize that you are different. The words she spoke that night will come alive and when this happens, please, please, please do not blame yourself. These people are merely scratching the surface of self discovery and you have already shattered the surface into pieces of glass that are so tiny, they look like pieces of glitter - let yourself shine in these glass fragments. You are so much more than an opinion of someone hiding behind a mask.

8. Let the people you live with see you cry and see you angry and see you happy. These are the people that you will remember forever and vice versa - at least make the effort to make a connection. And if there is no connection? Understand that they hurt too and have to wake up early for class too and aren't always going to have a good day too. Be on good terms with the people you live with.

9. Wash the dishes. Just do it.

10. Take the time to love yourself. Color, skate, watch youtube videos, or talk to your friends. Take a nap. Smoke a joint. Drink some tea. Go for a walk by yourself. Stand in the shower for longer than 10 minutes. Cry. Sit on the balcony and listen to the cars drive by. Go to the gym. Write. And please, feel. Feel everything. Feel the stress and hatred for yourself when you procrastinate on a speech you know you should have done

sooner, but also feel the way your heartbeats so fast when they tell you they'll spend the night. Feel the bass in your chest when you're standing in the middle of a party. Feel the laughter as it rises up your chest, rests in your smile, and vocalizes itself in your voice. Feel the clumsiness in your legs when you walk home drunk. Feel the nervousness of going to class for the first time and feel the way the water washes away the bad day. Feel the stretch in your neck and crack in your fingers when you take a break from doing homework. Don't restrict yourself from the rush of adrenaline, excitement, and fear of living - feel the love around you and you will thrive.

