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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ________ of ____________</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rebecca Renner</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass Shores</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jennifer Schmitt</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sam Slaughter</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth of July in Chartreuse</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amanda Jean Juliano</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Which the Earth</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nayma Russi</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions vs Reality</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Annie Moore</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I was Young in the Suburbs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Christina Canalizo</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shell Mound</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amada Jean Juliano</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spitfire</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nayma Russi</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter VI</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ian Campbell</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salty Vision</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kelli Pomroy</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry in My Mouth</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kyo-Nicole Padgett</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy? Ecstatic</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maggie Sheridan</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sense of 1 am: Dickinson XVI</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bianca Hernandez</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-esque</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mariash Duga</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places Like</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kelly Murray</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Die, To Dream</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Michael Johnpoll</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Inspection</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Megan Molle</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanity</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elizabeth Curry</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crazy, Bitch, and Dead</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maura Martin</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Portrait #2 (freckles)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rachel Mathes</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Megan Molle</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloth</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elizabeth Curry</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scars</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rachel Mathes</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind Follower</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Orion Meades</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CD CONTENTS

SAVE ME NOW  Michael Furlong
THE TRUTH IN THESE LIES  Michael Furlong
WAY OUT OF HERE  Peter Davis
Motors __________ through __________ __________, aching

__________ on the air. The __________fit so tightly

in my ____________, I dreamt right there—__________ stood, hands

invisible, ___________. The ____________ hit that ____________

while __________ bloomed from ____________.

__________ on the other ____________:

__________ fell from ____________, and I ____________

until my ____________ ran dry, and all turned to ____________.
The sea was purple
with unborn argument
Doubters called it a trick of angle.
Believers called it a sign,
yield sign on God’s highway.

Sign’s angle tricked ships,
so they demolished the scenic view,
a blasphemy to space.
No one could quite explain
the force of canyon walls.

Stripes scoured ridgebacks.
Trees crashed an age.
But the purple sea still wondered
at the canyon’s hurrying blasphemy.

And so no one really cared when the
sea carved canyon walls.
The place long ago evaporated,
drifted to dusty pages
hugged with leather.

Maybe I’ll take you there one day,
if the albatross will let us.

my mother always told me pine trees
sounded like waves, waving her back
to Lakewood’s pond where her bicycle
made courageous tracks all the way to
the rising horizon.

my mother always told me we moved
to a woods so we could learn love, but
she didn’t foresee the thorns her sew-
ing needle would tear from my skin.

my mother always told me to observe
the outside as well as inside, though
my brother said if you’ve seen one
mudpot, you’ve seen them all.

my mother always told me to trust the
story written in rock; their language
tells truth we’re too modern to see, but
how you see it won’t always remain.

I always thought I was she and she
was her mother, stretched all the way
back to when the sky and wheat fell in
love and decided to turn human.
We had gone over the Apostles—big A, Sister Marie reminded us every ten minutes, big A—for two days. Our second-floor, third grade classroom smelled sterile like paste and our cheap cotton-blended uniforms itched.

Religion class had blossomed from an hour to three by the second day that week. Despite needing to learn basics like math and spelling and social studies, we spent an excessive amount of time on religion every day. We’d listen to verses from the Bible then read a story in one of those kids’ illustrated Bible readers. Next, Sister Marie would tell a story that vaguely resembled the two others, but lacked the good transitions and interesting but heavy-handed dialogue. Finally, we’d have a quiz on the story just to see how holy we were. We’d hand-over-shoulder the yellow sheets of loose leaf, pull our pencils from our desks and obediently write our names and the date, risking an immediate zero if we didn’t.

“One person did not write his or her name on the paper,” Sister Marie said. She knew who it was, but she insistently doing this every time. I realized as soon as she said it who it was. I hung my head, staring at the brown plaid clip-on tie I had to wear. It was off-centered.

“Jacky, did you write your name?”

“Yes, Sister Marie,” Jacky Allwood, first row first seat, said. This continued through two more rows.

“Jeremy, did you write your name?”

I hesitated, though it was more for show than anything. If I said yes, I would be branded a liar, writing my own ticket to the confessional that smelled sour and cold like my house’s basement. If I said no, I was ensuring a letter home to my parents, written by me, explaining why I got a zero on a quiz that probably accounted for one-thousandth of my grade. It seemed the shame was more the grade than anything.

“No,” I said, still looking down.
“Excuse me?” Sister Marie said. She was now standing at the head of our row, ruler slowly tapping her open palm like one of those water-dipping birds. Michael John McDaniels shrunk in his seat in front of me. The little goody two-shoes, scared as always. His blond head looked like a pile of sawdust.

“I did not write my name, Sister Marie,” I said. There was a collective gulp from the class, like they had saved up saliva and tried to swallow wads of chewing gum.

“That’s what I thought,” Sister Marie said. She held my paper in her hand, high for everyone to see, like the priest held up the book before the gospel, and promptly ripped it in half, dropping the halves into the wastebasket by her desk. There was no shred of Catholic mercy in the act. There wasn’t any sort of Christian mercy whatsoever. Even though we had been taught that if you weren’t Catholic, you weren’t getting into Heaven, I was open at that point for a little bit of any type of mercy. Maybe some from the Lutherans, who had their church at the end of my block, or the Baptists, who had a billboard above their church showing a man holding a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other, priestly vestments perfectly pressed, ready to battle the heathens and demons of the world.

None came, however, which I thought was funny. Shouldn’t someone who was married to God be a little nicer, be willing to look past the fact that third graders tended to forget things like names and dates because those didn’t hold sway in life the way that the TV schedule for Power Rangers and if you could have friends over on the weekend did?

By that third day, a Wednesday—Ash Wednesday—Sister Marie seemed both desperate and furious, like a dying animal, because we could not remember twelve names in a specific order.

The names were up on the board when we walked in that morning. Sitting on a chair directly in front of the green chalkboard was a recorder, one of those boxy ones with buttons the size of Starburst candies, but lacking the neon colors. The mesh over the speaker looked like the metal that laced the boy’s bathroom windows. The windows reminded me of prisons I had seen on TV.

Sister Marie stood next to the recorder and waited for us to put
our stuff away and sit down. When we were quiet, she cleared her throat and pressed the play button. We could hear a piano playing single notes that sounded like they came from across the room, across decades. The notes echoed, adding a feeling of loneliness, like whoever recorded the notes—and it was probably Sister Marie or Sister Claire, the music teacher—was sitting alone and was just sad and nothing else. Twelve notes, one at a time, some grouped closer than others. There was a pause and the notes repeated. Sister Marie stood staring at us, locking eyes with everyone as if to say this is your last chance at salvation while the sequence repeated. The tape stopped, the play button popped, like the sound of someone clicking their tongue, and Sister Marie hit the rewind button.

“When this plays again, you will sing the names to the piano keys,” she said. She hummed the tune, if it could be called a tune, and pointed to the Apostles’ names as she did. “Does everyone understand?”

We replied in unison that we did, sounding about as excited as I normally did when I was told I had to go to my sister’s dance recitals or worse, church. Sister Marie nodded, appeased, and hit play.

The first time went as successfully as people at concerts trying to clap in rhythm, everyone thinking they should take the lead. By the third time, I felt we had it. We were on. We could’ve been the next great Catholic children’s choir, as long as we only had one song, and we didn’t need to sing in harmony.

“Andrew. Bartholomew. James James John,” I sang. I was getting into it. Singing actually was easier than just learning the names. In my head I applauded Sister Marie on her move. I wouldn’t have to fail another quiz and she wouldn’t have to teach something she had known for at least seventy years, possibly ninety.

The tape stopped and I breathed a sigh of relief. I was ready for this quiz. I could see Michael John was, too. He bounced up and down in his seat hands gripping the sides like he was trying to stretch his shoulder muscles, still humming the tune.

“We’re going to go through the tape one more time,” Sister Marie said. Derek, a boy in the fourth row, made a noise like he had just got hit in the head with a dodge ball, and Sister Marie shot him a look that would’ve frozen Jesus himself.

“We’re going to do it one more time,” she said, “then take the quiz.”
The notes started up and we had made it to Matthew when we heard a bang, a warbled coo, and a thud, like someone had punched the inside of a baseball glove, come from near the window. We stopped singing and, as a class, in one of those moments where even the dumb kid and the one who smelled like he always had crap in his pants were with us, looked over.

Sister Marie’s eyes shot over to the window. She slowly, delicately almost, pushed the pause button, like she wasn’t sure she should, like it was one of those big red buttons on all those nuclear war shows that said “Do Not Push”. She walked over to the window, picking her way through our rows like Pac Man navigating his maze and stood looking at the large glass pane. She leaned closer to it, adjusted her glasses with one hand, and placed a fingertip on the glass. She stood like that a moment and we sat staring at her back, the wide expanse of navy nun gear like a starless sky, but for the flakes of dandruff that floated out from under her habit. She looked like a blue tree, just standing there.

After removing her finger, Sister Marie then stuck her head out the window—out into the real world, where nuns weren’t supposed to exist—looked up, then down. She pulled her head in and made her way to the front of the room again.

“It was a pigeon,” she said. “It hit the window and fell. We’ll continue from where we left off.”

She hit the play button and we continued singing.

There was no prayer for the pigeon. There was nothing. It lay out there, dead, in a pile that would be shoveled up and tossed into the big green dumpster behind the school. And yet we continued to sing about people that had been dead for over a thousand years, people that had probably gotten to say goodbye to their families, their kids, gotten their affairs in order. We’d remember their names, but we wouldn’t take time to remember a bird whose last image was of twenty kids, in brown plaid and gray, singing off key, praying for it to be over.
The drunkards took to shuffling—
immerged in beer and plastic loungers
where I sat and watched them twirl
the fireworks across their fingers,
exhale purple smoke and stories
of other uncles, older gods of fire,
who also sang into empty bottles,
and blew the smoke off burnt lips,
and waded, like them, like me,
through a sulfur thunder-storm,
sea-glass fog and thickened evening,
thinning sparks to dull pops.

My uncle, prophet of slur and sideways,
always bending whichways with purple,
smoking bottle, tapped away the firecrackers,
synched with the spider-lightning, that curled
from yellow cloud to yellow cloud, and cracked
the sky and grew blue like the veins of a hand.
The woods know him too well. Gun in hand,
tinny apologies snowflake his tongue,
lungs burst lightning in his rib cage;
they know his story begins like the rest,

plays like time-lapsed weather patterns on cotton.
Branches held down by the weight of the earth brush
his shoulders, snag at the stitching of sighs,
skin, and cracked vigor. This is a conservation area

for birds—down the road a housing development
farms families full of Klan leaders.
The city is a closed organism. Roots prod their way
through wire fencing and dirt roads where we walk.

Wild dogs followed our shadows, lapped at our footsteps;
we named the kind ones and sent the rest to die in the woods
like people, like animals, but never birds. Leaves crackle under
feet, encouraging the overlooked history on his back.

He takes the path we left, choosing the public route.
Veering toward the opening in the canopy he’s where
we sat in the summers we spent folded into one another.
His shoulders give under gravity, under shade.

We knew the city, but not the woods.
Clawing at dirt, his coffin is twenty acres of oak
spackled among the seedlings in a warm front.
We vomit with grief.
Perception vs Reality
Annie Moore

Jason was the kind of guy who lied too much and thought too little. I think that’s why I liked him so much more than our sister who had a corkboard pinned above her bed with her whole life charted out in color-coded squares.

He was my favorite person ever. I’d do pretty much anything for him.

It was cold the night he woke me with a deviant grin.

“Wakey, wakey, twerp,” he said. “You and me are going to go on an adventure.”

He didn’t give me the chance to rub the sleep from my eyes before he threw my big coat at me and ducked through the open window. Fleeting touches of cold lapped over the floor, like waves wiping the edge of the shore.

Half-asleep, I asked him what was going on. He just jerked his head out towards the street.

“It’ll be fun,” he said.

I followed him blindly.

As we cut through our backyard, I made sure my steps fell just as silently as Jason’s. If we woke up Mr. Showalter’s Doberman, the dog barking would give us away for sure. Jason was already supposed to be grounded for getting caught tagging something unforgivably terrible on the side of the bank; I didn’t want to think about what Mom and Dad would do if they caught us now. I didn’t think they liked Jason as much as I did.

We must have been perfectly quiet, because I didn’t even hear the dog stir. We slipped out of our neighborhood without making a sound.

Jason walked beside me, slowing his pace because my legs weren’t as long as his yet. His eyes were focused forward, watching the orange wash of the streetlights over the sidewalk. He kept his chin
up, walking with the rolling gait of a pirate with one leg. He favored his right leg. I asked what happened, but he didn’t answer me. He stopped grinning after we left the neighborhood. Whenever he could get the right angle, he’d pause beneath a streetlight and huff up to the sky. His breath clouded out around his face, and he’d watch the fragments hover before he batted the cloud away.

On anyone else, it would have been annoying.
“Why do you do that?” I asked.
He shrugged, popping another Mento into his mouth. He always carried Mentos—mint. I had never seen anyone like mint Mentos so much. I was pretty sure Jason was the only reason mint Mentos were still made.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked.
He answered by puffing his minty breath out to the wind.
Eventually, we started competing, each trying to outdo the cloud before.
We walked in a silence he perpetuated. The farther we walked, the smaller his grin became. I didn’t think much of it until he let a streetlight pass without trying to see his breath.
My little cloud of breath hung in the air alone.
“What’s up?”
He tucked his hands into his pockets and wouldn’t look at me.
“Just stop doing that, okay?”
He had another Mento.
We were in the middle of town, walking right down Main Street. It looked different at night. Not just because it was empty; there was something else. It was like a smell you recognized but couldn’t really remember where you’d smelled it before. When we passed by a convenience store, he patted my arm with the back of his hand and nodded towards the door.
“I’m out of Mentos,” he said.
I didn’t want to go in, but I didn’t want to stay outside by myself either. The guy inside gave me the creeps. He looked at Jason the way most grownups did, his eyes unconsciously narrow, his whole body tense. I saw his hand move under the counter. I wondered if he had a button that would call the police like banks did in movies. If he did, he would be ready to press it the second Jason made a wrong move.

Jason ignored the guy and guided me ahead of him like a little
shield. He weaved us through the sticky aisles, scanning the shelves. I wanted to ask why we did this. If he wanted more Mentos, why weren’t we in candy aisle? Why did he pull a box of garbage bags off the shelf and zip them up with me inside my big jacket? Why, when I asked him if that was the only reason why he wanted me to wear my big jacket, did he only smile at me and let me wonder while he got his Mentos?

It wasn’t like I hadn’t helped him steal stuff before. I was used to this routine. I learned not to make a fuss about it. Usually, though, he stole candy or magazines.

Something wasn’t right.

Jason was at the end of the candy aisle, looking for his Mentos, in a second, he was up at the counter, empty Mentos box in his hand. The guy behind the counter flinched when Jason slapped the box down in front of him.

“You have any more in the back?” Jason asked.

“That’s all we have,” the guy said. “If it isn’t on the shelf, we don’t have it.”

I couldn’t see my brother’s face, but he grew very still. “Could you check?”

“I’m telling you, that’s all we got.”

“Check.”

“There won’t be any—”

Jason threw his hands down on to the counter. “Check the goddamn back!”

Everything froze for a moment. Eventually, the guy’s eyes flicked to me and he softened a bit. “I’ll be right back,” he said.

“Goddamn right you will!”

The second the guy turned away from us, Jason’s hand disappeared over the counter. He hurried over to me, the pale green corners of crumbled dollars sticking out of his sleeve.

“Let’s go.”

He dragged me out of the store by my sleeve. He pulled too hard.

Halfway down the street, I managed to wiggle away from him.

“Jason, what the hell?”

“You’re too young to swear,” he said.

“I’ll do whatever I goddamn want.”

His eyes held back a storm. “You think you’re just like me, don’t you?”

I didn’t know what to say, so I didn’t say anything. I pulled the same
twisted scowl he gave me. He smacked the back of my head and kept going.

“We’re almost there.”
I followed him. He didn’t slow down for me.
Sucking on his teeth, he hopped over a fence. He didn’t wait for me to crawl through the narrow gap between the fence and the wall, but he paused before rounding the corner. He looked back to me, smiling wide and bright for the first time that night.
He cocked an eyebrow. “Want to see our adventure?”
Before I could answer, he pulled me over to his other side and I saw a still mound of fur in the corner of the empty lot.
“What is that?” I asked.
He fished the garbage bags from my big jacket.
I followed him as he pulled opened the box and shook out one of the bags, snapping it like a whip.
Even if it wasn’t so still, I would have known that it was dead. The air didn’t cloud up around what was left of its face. Standing over it, Jason blew air up into the sky. It didn’t seem very much like a game anymore. He knelt down over Mr. Showalter’s stone-still Doberman and huffed a huge cloud of breath over its face, as if to gloat. Jason was the one who was still alive.
“What happened to it?” I asked.
 Jason passed me the box. “People get too attached to things.” He hefted the dog’s backside into the garbage bag and started working it in.
“Why did Mr. Showalter even like this thing so much? All it ever did was bark all the goddamn time. What good does a spastic dog do anyone?”
He’d gotten the whole dog in the bag. Pulling it up by the dark red handles, the weight of the dog shifted to the bottom of the bag, testing the plastic’s strength. He considered the bag, holding it up.
“You think we should double-bag it?”
The boy in front of me wasn’t my brother. My brother wouldn’t have killed Mr. Showalter’s dog. My brother was a cut up, sure, the kind of guy who got into the sort of trouble everyone wanted to be in just once in their lives. I never thought he was this. I never thought he was actually anything like the boy Mom and Dad and that guy in the convenience store thought he was.
He spread his arms wide. “What?”
Without saying a word, I dropped the box and turned around.
When I was young in the suburbs, there was an empty lot across from our house. Bulldozers cleared the trees, shredded the bushes, and piled mounds of dirt three times as tall as I.

But they never built a house. The dirt mounds, chain-link fences, and neon signs were left standing in the vacant wind, and the bulldozers never returned.

When I was young in the suburbs, my brother and I would tiptoe through the cactus fields and cross over to the empty lot.

We would dart behind the dirt mounds, popping our cap guns and shooting our pistols and shouting, and my brother would rev his go-kart as we leapt from mound-to-mound.
When I was young in the suburbs, there was an empty lot which dissolved into the Wild West, an African plain, or the Rocky Mountains, forming a stage for our adventures.

We carried our toys through the dirt mounds and tugged along a red wagon with Daisy, our Basset Hound, howling in approval.

When I was young in the suburbs, my brother and I would return home with blackened knees and grass stains on our shirts.

My mother would welcome us with a steaming bowl of Kraft Mac & Cheese, Velveeta Shells, or Chef Boyardee, and we would fall right asleep.
We ran dramas over shell-roads until they became the river Styx, stood on either shore of vast pine-islands, low orange on white.

In the mornings we stretched ourselves across shell-rivers, to my teachers performing pig-Latin in babel, fluent in backwards, in etchings, in script.

And you skipped: away to dunes, and swamps, and splinters off the too-tall blueberry bushes your great-grandfather planted.

And legend has it they’re fertilized by corpses of pines, ripped down and rotted orange, one thousand hurricanes ago.

And so I hear tell that old man knew Sinatra, saw Troy fall, knew Kings, and played hide-and-seek on the shell mound.

We ended up hiding from truancy officers in a field near Crescent City. Saps had gone all patriotic, got all pretty selling Crescent City woodworks.

We sat under a tent and made eyes at the “Belle of Crescent City:”

At Christmas I still recite New York, Vegas, Philadelphia, North, East, West, with no way to define them. I never smell of anything but sand.

We’ve always lived on streets with seaside names and no shore in sight, while legend has it here used to be the ocean

like there used to be my mother hiding Easter eggs in the fog

or there used to be a father who ran away with the belle of Crescent City because what he really needed—what we really need, man—was a lady of citrus on lunar.

Just like there was once a brother, even a sister, and grandfathers who knew Kings. They lived in cradles on our rivers.

And legend has it that there really was once a shell-heap there on the banks that crooned toward the sky and was crushed in the 1950s.
Luca could never appreciate the faux Italian motif of his workplace. He walked past the bright green ivy vines that crawled up the lattice, the walkways made of slabbled cobblestone, the matching earth-toned and dimpled plaster walls. He couldn’t even stand to call the greasy Chicken Parmesan a “dish,” so he’d started to call it a “plate.” The customers, both regulars and newcomers, adored the vines and walkway when they showed up for brunch, lunch, dinner, and happy hour. They would grin like idiots while “That’s Amore” played over the hidden wall speakers every hour, on the hour, and ask if the pressed plywood gondola near the front was an authentic Italian gondola. Luca would always answer, with as charming a smile as he could muster, “It’s as authentic as everything else here.”

He preferred the rear of the building that fed into a dark back alley. This is where the shipments of prepackaged home-style food were moved from a truck and pushed up the ramps, into the restaurant, and eventually into their customers’ impatient guts. The ramp was lined with a long metal railing to keep the carts and dollies from rolling off, but its current use was as a popular spot for staff to sit and smoke. Luca sat on the railing while Cara and Marco stood in front of him. Marco was the dishwasher in the group while Luca and Cara worked the floor taking down orders, pouring wine, and putting up with all levels of indignation.

“This bitch had the nerve to ask if I even knew what medium-well was,” Luca slurred around his Marlboro, the red and white pack stuffed sloppily into his left vest pocket near his waist so it stretched the fabric.

“Oh God, here we go again,” Cara dragged.

“And what did you tell her?” Marco smiled in anticipation. As a dishwasher, he was significantly less formally dressed and if he didn’t stand out enough already, his tanned skin, tousled dark hair, and South American features made sure he would. The trio would often note how they resembled the stars of a Clairol hair color commercial; Marco with
his dark, black hair, Cara the redhead, and Luca the signature blonde.

“I told her,” Luca continued. “Bitch, I know what medium-well is.’ I told her, ‘it’s brown all around and some pink in the center.’ I told this bitch, ‘it’s two flip-flops with an overcooked strip of steak in the middle. That’s what you wanted, that’s what you got,’ and that’s what I told her.” He punctuated the end of his sentence with a quick inhale then exhale of smoke while ash mounted on ash. Luca never tapped the ash off his cigarettes; he always let it flake off on its own accord.

Cara rolled her eyes, “The day I don’t hear this story is the day I die happy.”

Marco and Luca laughed into the pavement.

“I might get on the floor soon.” Marco said once the laughter died down, “If Angler stops being a tease.”

Luca grinned at the nickname while Cara adjusted her bra. She was always complaining about the women’s vests being a size too small so their cleavage would force itself up. Neither Luca nor Marco believed it; they just noted how the vest and the cleavage probably accounted for about eighty percent of her tips.

However, neither Marco nor Luca put it past the manager to purposefully put the waitresses and their assets on display. It was one of the many reasons why Richard Barnes, their manager, was given his nickname. Mr. Barnes was an avid fisherman, an asshole, and had an underbite that made his top lip disappear when he frowned. Naturally, he was dubbed “Angler” as an innocent nod to his fishing prowess, but also because the staff agreed he resembled an anglerfish.

“You look more Italian than anybody else,” Luca argued, “You should own this shit shack, not Angler.” Marco only needed a few changes to look like an authentic Italian, by Luca’s opinion. “Just grow a mustache, curl it, and learn some words.” He nodded as if it were that easy. Cara shot him a tired look that he ignored and continued, “You’ll own the place by public demand. Hell, I’ll stuff the suggestion box for you.”

“I’m not Italian,” Marco said.

“I thought you were some of everything?”

“No Italian.”

Luca gave him a cursory glance like he was calling his bluff.
“Well, then what are you? Once and for all, break it down to the percent if you want.”

Everyone knew Marco lived in the part of town where teenage girls took the school bus to pick up their kid at daycare, the part of town where the Xbox got stolen before the TV. He lived where Puerto Rican flags flew over American ones and all the stores were small local-owned shops that sold calling cards and pulled pork with rice for $3.50. There, Marco fit in with the furniture while Luca always felt like he’d walked into the wrong country.

The thing that no one seemed to know was where Marco was from. The other dishwashers didn’t have a clue, although they’d try breaking down Marco’s facial structure and what little bits of Spanish he’d let slip. One of them swore he had to be Mexican and Venezuelan while the other insisted he was from the islands, maybe the Dominican Republic and Cuba, but maybe Puerto Rico just a little. Marco was always a mix to them, he was never just Dominican or just Mexican or just Marco, and Luca had to wonder if they were full of shit. It didn’t matter, because Marco never confirmed or denied any of it. What Luca did know was that Marco came into the country in the engine compartment of a semi-truck rigged to run on a regular size engine. He was the only one that knew Marco lived in a rented duplex with about fifteen other guys who all spoke little to no English, but all knew what “work” and “beer” meant. He often wondered why Marco didn’t just agree to move in with him. Lord knows he offered almost bi-weekly.

“I mean which part of South America,” Luca elaborated, “Mexico, right?” More ash fell from his cigarette as he gestured and ignored Cara’s look of total scandal. Luca wasn’t as sensitive to political correctness as she was, but he was under the impression that Cara’s knowledge of the world came from web blogs run by uppity college chicks with Photoshop and a lean toward glittery graphics and overused quotes from dead poets. He felt that Cara believed her browser history somehow entitled her to judge people if they tried to have any fun. Luca never let her get to him and she resented him for it.

“Marco, you don’t have to answer that,” she said, a downcast expression focused on Luca. She never turned her attention to the dishwasher.

“I’m from every part,” Marco answered, his dirty white cotton
T-shirt folding over as he shrugged so the stitching on his breast read as Mo. It was a size too big and never did him any justice.

“You can’t be from every part,” Luca said, “You told Cara the other day you were German.”

“He never told me he was German,” Cara cut in. “How does he look even a little German to you?”

Lately, Luca had started to blend reality with his dreams. It surprised him that the visions were always of work, of Marco, but it meant he was often bringing up events that never happened. Luca could only shrug and Cara waved her hand at the both of them. “I’m heading back in. You boys be good.”

She opened up the heavy back door and disappeared into the building, her copper ponytail swishing around the back of her neck as a wave of heat burst from the kitchen and out into the alleyway. Silence hovered long after the door was closed and the heat subsided. Marco spoke first, “I never talk to Cara. She’s crazy. You know she told me you were up for Employee of the Month, can you imagine that?” The both of them snorted and Marco looked down at his feet.

“You know dishwashers can’t get that shit?” He said, “Racist as fuck,” Marco trailed off at the vowel of the expletive until he was staring down the alley and watched cars pass them by. He missed the heat of the kitchen and wondered why he and Luca didn’t just hang around the stock room full of dry pasta and flour. They’d be alone there.

Luca followed his focus, “It’s only a matter of time ‘till Angler gets one of those machines to do your job, you know?” The cigarette was nearing the filter as Marco moved and hopped onto the railing upwind, gripping onto the metal to balance. They didn’t move their hands when the sides of their palms and pinky fingers pressed together.

Luca cleared his throat, the smoke clogging up his lungs momentarily.

“Once Angler kisses enough ass and gets that washer he’s been talking about, you’ll be out on the front lines with me,” Luca said, “And the kitchen? It’ll be more machine than it is people.”

“Or I’ll be out on my ass.”

Marco had a knack for calling up awkward silence. The record, as far as Luca experienced, was a solid minute and a half. It happened a few weeks ago when he decided to quit smoking. Marco was on leave
that whole week, getting legal papers worked out for citizenship, and on his first day back he was the only one that didn’t know Luca was trying to quit. Once it was brought up, Marco didn’t hesitate to laugh at his face. Luca could honestly say he was insulted, even hurt, but without missing a beat, Marco pulled out his own half-empty pack of Marlboro Reds.

“They’d remind me of you,” he’d said, in that rakish, syrupy way that Luca never heard come from anyone else. He remembered the silence, then laughing and punching Marco in the arm, calling him a faggot, and falling back into an even heavier silence. It wouldn’t have lasted as long had Luca’s jaw not been so stiff from the egg-sized wad of Nicorette gum in his cheek. Less than a week later, Luca got back to smoking a pack and a half a day, but Marco dropped the habit almost immediately. Luca could never figure out how.

“Don’t say that. You’ll be here for as long as I’m here.” Luca shook his head, taking a final inhale before flicking the filter into a puddle. “Where would we find another place looking to hire a couple guys like us? It can’t be done.” He waved off the idea and some lingering smoke before pulling the rectangular carton out of his vest pocket.

Marco made it a habit to count the number of cigarettes Luca would smoke around him on a daily basis. He was pretty sure there were about twenty in a pack, but he never saw Luca with a fresh one. There were always three or four cigarettes missing and in that space Luca would store a Bic lighter, usually an orange one, but sometimes red. Marco found it difficult to imagine Luca without the cigarettes, the lighters, or smelling like anything other than smoke and that soap with the stupid commercials.

“Yeah,” Marco sighed, staring at the collapsed red and white pack. “How’s Home-Ec?”

“It’s going okay, I guess,” Luca tapped out another cigarette. Marco smiled, counting it as number nine, “Why just ‘okay?’”

“You know those flowers made of fondant, the ones that go on cakes and shit?”

Marco nodded.

“They melt if your hands are too warm. It’s not like I do it on purpose,” he held his hand out, palm up, and the cigarette between his index and middle finger to demonstrate.

“It’s not like I can conjure up fireballs or anything, but I can’t
make those little flowers to save my life,” he said. “I can’t even hold one for too long because the fondant starts to warp and it falls apart. We’re going to be on fondant flowers until Friday and I have to sit at a separate table making daisies out of Play-Doh like a retard.”

Snorting, Marco trailed off into a laugh. He watched the blonde slide the toes of his shoes under the lower railing to take both his hands up and light the cigarette. There wasn’t a breeze, but Luca cupped the flame anyway. Marco found it difficult to fight the urge to ask Luca if he knew how many he’d smoked so far, but even harder to ask exactly how many cigarettes were in a pack, and impossible to ask why Luca thought the world wanted to stop him from smoking just one more.

Instead, he said, “Your blood runs hot.”

Luca immediately laughed around the fresh, smoldering cigarette, “Yeah? And what the fuck does that mean?”

“It means you live passionately,” Marco said, choosing to ignore the look of horror on his friend’s face.

“It means you feel more than other people. That’s what I’ve always heard, but you know how Spanish people put meaning on all types of bullshit that doesn’t really matter, like that Jesus toast.”

Luca tried to look as if he’d heard that before, but he hadn’t. He said, “Damn, and here I thought I had superpowers or something.”

“Mistakes happen.”

Another pause washed over them.

“Why do you have to keep bringing that back up?” Luca stubbed the lit end of the cigarette on his tongue and stuck it back into the pack, snubbed end facing up.

“All I said is that mistakes happen. You don’t need to get all worked up, or ashamed, or anything.”

“No one’s ashamed of anything, Marco.” He tapped the lid open and closed and waited a few seconds before handing it to the dishwasher. “Look, I’ll be out in another half hour; if the bitch ate the whole steak I’ll snag us a new bottle of the twenty-fivers to celebrate. Red, not white.”

Marco took the pack and slid off the railing. He stuck it into his back pocket so the cigarettes wouldn’t get splashed with dirty dishwater once he got back to his station. He would have turned toward the door and back inside, but moved to look at Luca and waited for him to finish because he knew Luca was never done talking when it seemed he was.
Luca glanced up. He tilted his head, “If she only ate some of it, I’ll get one of the open bottles from the cooler.”
“And what if she didn’t eat any of it?”
They stared at one another in a waiting silence, the both of them unmoving until Luca’s lip started to curl at one end and his stare dropped to the floor. His scuffed shoes pointing in at the toes, he said, “I’ll pack it for you, like always.”
Prism[s] of

yellow lights fill the sky to its brim,

angles $i_1$ and $i_2$ find thrill in

deviation on the

lens of child's gaze.

[A] slit allows room for promenades

performed along

standard angles $i_1$ and $i_2$ to illuminate

medium[s] vaster than

“dispersion formulae.”
Salty Vision
Kelli Pomroy

Seconds of barreling blues and uncertainty. Beyond horizons the enigma of future clings to sand. Our vast wasteland of urgency collects dust every second. Barreling blues of uncertainty imprint our past in sunken sea scrolls. Eternity blinds our lighthouse crashes onto eroded land in seconds, washed up by barreling blues of uncertainty. Beyond horizons the enigma of future still rests in sand.
Yours is a tangible language –

One that places incoherent syllables
next to miscellaneous meter
and engrains itself in the walls
of my mouth

like dice thrown
against my cheek,
ricocheting over my tongue,
orbiting,
ever really landing
pushing instead to escape
from pursed lips.

Yours is a language you carry
in your limbs.

I've tried to mimic it,
but you still know
more than I do;
false ideas make
their way to the surface.

Your words mean too much
in the soft morning light.

I'll carry them in my mouth.
Happy? Ecstatic
Maggie Sheridan

**Cast of Characters**

**Dani:** 21; an English major at Crestbridge University. VALERIE’s roommate. Reserved, yet snarky.

**Valerie:** 21; a Marketing major at Crestbridge University. DANI’s roommate. A fun-loving girl who still knows how to prioritize.

**Mike:** 22; a recent college graduate. VALERIE’s old high school friend and DANI’s new love interest. Playful and witty, but with a vulnerable side.

**Allison (Ali):** 22; DANI’s old roommate. A mutual friend of both DANI and VALERIE since Freshman year at CBU.

**Tom:** 19; Delivery boy. Also a fellow classmate of DANI’s.

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**ACT II**

**Scene 2**

*(VALERIE - dressed in a sexy little negligee - is behind the kitchen counter, pouring a cup of coffee. DANI enters, wearing her robe. The two stare at one another for a moment, but neither speaks. DANI finally takes a seat on the couch.)*

DANI

Are we just gonna sit here in silence all morning?

VALERIE

Works for me.

DANI

You know, I never realized someone could actually be fluent in "bitch."

VALERIE

Lay off, Dani.

DANI

Why should I? You’re the one who went completely postal last night.

VALERIE

I told you I was sorry about that when I got up this morning.
DANI
   Fair enough, but you still haven’t explained anything.

VALERIE
   There’s nothing to explain.

DANI
   Bullshit.

VALERIE
   You want some coffee?

DANI
   Don’t change the subject.

   (VALERIE fills a mug for DANI.)

VALERIE
   You like just a little bit of creamer, right?

DANI
   Quit avoiding the --

VALERIE
   Just answer the question. It’s a simple "yes" or "no."

DANI
   Yes.

VALERIE
   That’s what I thought.

   (VALERIE carries both mugs into the living room.
   She takes a seat in the vacant chair.)

DANI
   Now ... where was I?

VALERIE
   Bitching at me. Why, I don’t know. I mean, I already apologized.

DANI
   I know you, did, Val, but you can’t just walk into our apartment, have an out of this world fit, and expect me to forget about it.

VALERIE
   I did not have a fit.

   (VALERIE raises her mug to her lips but is interrupted before she can take a sip.)
DANI
You could’ve passed for a two-year old.

VALERIE
Can we please postpone the arguing till after I’ve had my coffee?

DANI
I would, but coffee makes you go soft, and then you forget things.

VALERIE
That’s what organizers are for. Speaking of which, I still need to call one of the other tutors about the --

DANI
Val, focus!

VALERIE
I am focusing, Dani! It’s not my fault if there are more important things than me sitting here, satisfying your morbid curiosity.

DANI
Fine. Just forget it.

VALERIE
Finally.

   (VALERIE and DANI sip their coffee. A brief, yet awkward moment passes.)

DANI
Mike’s worried about you, you know.

VALERIE
He didn’t seem worried last night.

DANI
Well no, not when you were stabbing him with verbal daggers. I’m talking about after you went to bed. You had him so upset that he almost walked out at one point.

VALERIE
Key word: almost.

DANI
When did you start caring so much about semantics?

VALERIE
I don’t.
DANI
Then get over yourself and just tell me what happened at dinner last night.

VALERIE
What makes you think something happened at dinner?

DANI
Gee, I dunno, Val. You leave happy - have dinner - then come home pissed at the world. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist.

VALERIE
Nothing happened. Ali just took her Dr. Laura bit a tad too far.

DANI
Well, duh. I assumed that much. She’s every bit annoying as she is sweet. Did anything else happen?

VALERIE
Not really. She and I just talked.

DANI
And what was your topic of choice exactly? Nuclear warfare?

VALERIE
Dani, I’m begging you ... just stop.

DANI
I will when you tell me what happened.

VALERIE
Why do you even --

DANI
Because I care about you!

   (A look of shock covers VALERIE’s face.)
   Yes, even I’m capable of compassion.

VALERIE
I never assumed you weren’t.

DANI
Sure you did. Everybody does. But whatever, this isn’t about me.

VALERIE
We can make it about you if you want.
DANI
No, no. I’m way too invested in you at the moment. So c’mon, Val. Spill already.

VALERIE
Fine. But you have to promise me one thing.

DANI
What?

VALERIE
That you won’t breathe a word of this to Mike. He and I are having lunch next week - er, I think we are anyway - and I don’t want any of this getting out before then.

DANI
Deal.

(DANI takes a sip of her coffee.)

VALERIE
(quickly)
Okay, here goes: Ali thinks I should tell Mike I used to be in love with him (beat) And that I had an abortion.

(DANI starts choking on her coffee.)

DANI
Wait, what! You slept with Mike?

VALERIE
No.

DANI
But you had an --

VALERIE
Different guy.

DANI
But you were in love with --

VALERIE
Yes.

DANI
When did this --

VALERIE
We were fifteen.
DANI
How could you not tell me about this? We live together, Val! Am I seriously just a roommate to you?

VALERIE
No, but ... it’s not exactly something I’m proud of.

DANI
Any why would you set me up with someone you’re secretly crushing on?

VALERIE
I’m not crushing. Like I told Ali, I loved Mike a long time ago.

DANI
Are you sure?

VALERIE
What do you mean?

DANI
Think about it, Val. You confess to Ali that you were in love with Mike --

VALERIE
No, she already knew that part.

DANI
Still. She encourages you to tell him, and when you come back here and find the two of us together, you go ballistic.

VALERIE
What are you saying? That I’m still in love with him?

DANI
I dunno.

VALERIE
Well, put your mind at rest. Those feelings are long gone.

DANI
You’re sure?

VALERIE
Absolutely sure (beat) why are you so concerned anyway?

DANI
No reason.
VALERIE
You wouldn’t happen to be falling for my friend, would you?

DANI
Not at all. Ali’s never been my type.

VALERIE
(giggling)
Oh, stop! You know who I mean!

DANI
He’s nice, that’s all. I’m actually still in shock we got along so well.

VALERIE
Me, too, for that matter. I was certain you’d have him in tears after five minutes.

DANI
What about after ten minutes?

VALERIE
I never assumed you’d get that far.

DANI
It’s weird, Val. Mike and I just clicked for some reason.

VALERIE
That happens sometimes.

DANI
I can totally see why he’s one of your best friends. He’s really easy to talk to.

VALERIE
And fall for apparently.

DANI
Hey, even you were guilty of that at one point, so no giving me crap for it.

VALERIE
I’m not (beat) just be careful, Dani.

DANI
You got it, mom. Trojan all the way.

(Both girls laugh.)
VALERIE
  You are SO dirty!

DANI
  No, a college guy’s dorm room is dirty. I’m just ... honest.

VALERIE
  In that case, can I ask you something?

DANI
  You just did.

VALERIE
  Be serious.

DANI
  I was.

VALERIE
  Dani!

DANI
  Fine... shoot.

VALERIE
  Do you think I should tell Mike?

DANI
  About the abortion and stuff?

VALERIE
  Yeah.

DANI
  It’s up to you, hon. But I gotta ask, if he’s such a great friend, why didn’t you tell him sooner?

VALERIE
  It’s complicated.

DANI
  Great movie. Lame-ass excuse.

VALERIE
  What other excuse is there?

DANI
  The obvious one. You were scared.

VALERIE
  Of what exactly?
DANI
Of Mike rejecting you, hating you, judging you, deserting you (beat) I can keep going ...

VALERIE
No, that’s okay.

(Both girls take a sip of coffee. DANI tenses up a bit.)

DANI
So after you tell him all this stuff, you think it’s gonna change things?

VALERIE
Not really. Mike and I haven’t been super close for years. I guess distance just sort of worked its way between us.

DANI
Makes sense. Lying to someone’s face usually makes it difficult to be around them.

VALERIE
How would you know? You’re the most honest person I’ve ever met.

DANI
No, I’m the most belligerent person you’ve ever met. I have my secrets ... just like any girl.

VALERIE
Yeah, right. Like what?

DANI
Stuff.

VALERIE
(sarcastic)
Oh, okay.

DANI
You asked.

VALERIE
C’mon ... you’ve never done anything crazy? Like stolen something or cheated on someone?

DANI
You got me. I pilfered panties from a department store and then had sex in one of the dressing rooms.
VALERIE
  You did not.

DANI
  What makes you so sure?

VALERIE
  Because no one in their right mind would have sex in a department store dressing room. The lighting is waaaay too harsh.

DANI
  True story.

VALERIE
  So nothing then? Your past is totally normal?

DANI
  I wouldn’t say normal. Unfortunate is probably a better word.

VALERIE
  Ooo, now we’re getting somewhere.

DANI
  Don’t get excited.

VALERIE
  I’m not excited, just curious. So what happened? Was it bad?

DANI

VALERIE
  Well, just remember one thing: at least it’s not as bad as what happened to me.

DANI
  You don’t know that.

VALERIE
  Dani, I had an abortion and lost the love of my life. I don’t think your situation could be much worse.

DANI
  That’s crap.

VALERIE
  Says who?
DANI  
    Me.

VALERIE  
    Why?

DANI  
    Because you’re not the only person God likes to use for target practice!

VALERIE  
    What?

DANI  
    Nothing. Just forget it.

VALERIE  
    No, I don’t think I will. I want you to tell me, Dani. Tell me right now why your life is so much worse than mine. Go ahead, say it.

DANI  
    You really wanna know why?

VALERIE  
    (aggressively)  
      Yeah, I do.

DANI  
    Fine. Here’s why.
      
      (DANI sets down her coffee and rips off her robe, revealing a tank top and pajama bottoms. The burns on DANI’s arms also extend to her chest and part of her upper back. VALERIE just stares at her in horrid disbelief.)

VALERIE  
    Oh my God. When did this hap --

DANI  
    I don’t wanna talk about it.
      
      (DANI snatches her robe furiously wraps it around herself.)

VALERIE  
    Dani, I had no i --

DANI  
    Exactly. You don’t know anything. So shut up and leave me alone.
      
      (DANI exits, and the slamming of her bedroom door is heard offstage. VALERIE starts to leave her chair, but then glances toward DANI’s bedroom and resumes her seat. Curtain closes.)
To fight aloud is very brave,
But gallanter, I know,
Who charge within the bosom,
The cavalry of woe.
Who win, and nations do not see,
Who fall, and none observe,
Whose dying eyes no country Regards.

We trust, in plumed procession,
For such the angels go,
Rank after rank, with even feet
And uniforms of snow.
-esque
Mariash Duga

this city is a mouth or a thousand mouths
Museum of the streets, marbled arms and Mucha, bridges padlocked to crumble, every corner

this city is
a theater, every building a face. Museum of toes stubbed on history. Museum of

a mouth
watched. Of chocolate. Of torture. Museum of every brick

or a thousand mouths
a poet homesick for asphalt. Museum of puppets

food carts, carriage horses. Museum of primary inks, lost souls calligraphied on walls.
A place like the drop off -

Meet- here?

Whisper to no one - whisper good bye, like the normal people do - in an invisible, mastered, way.

“I may miss you.”

“But, maybe... Good bye.”

As these normal people say.
To Die, To Dream
Michael Johnpoll
Close Inspection
Megan Molle
Vanity
Elizabeth Curry
Crazy, Bitch, and Dead
Maura Martin
Self Portrait #2 (freckles)
Rachel Mathes
Doris

Megan Molle
Scars
Rachel Mathes
Blind Follower
Orion Meades
TOUCHSTONE AWARDS

Best Poem
Fourth of July in Chartreuse by Amanda Jean Juliano

Best Fiction
Spitfire by Nayma Russi

Best Digital Art
Sloth by Elizabeth Curry

Best Photography
Blind Follower by Orion Meades

Best Music
The Truth in These Lies by Michael Furlong

Best Fine Art
Close Inspection by Megan Molle

Best Drama
Happy? Ecstatic by Maggie Sheridan