

A Day in the Life of a Survivor

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OF A SURVIVOR

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see. hear. heal.

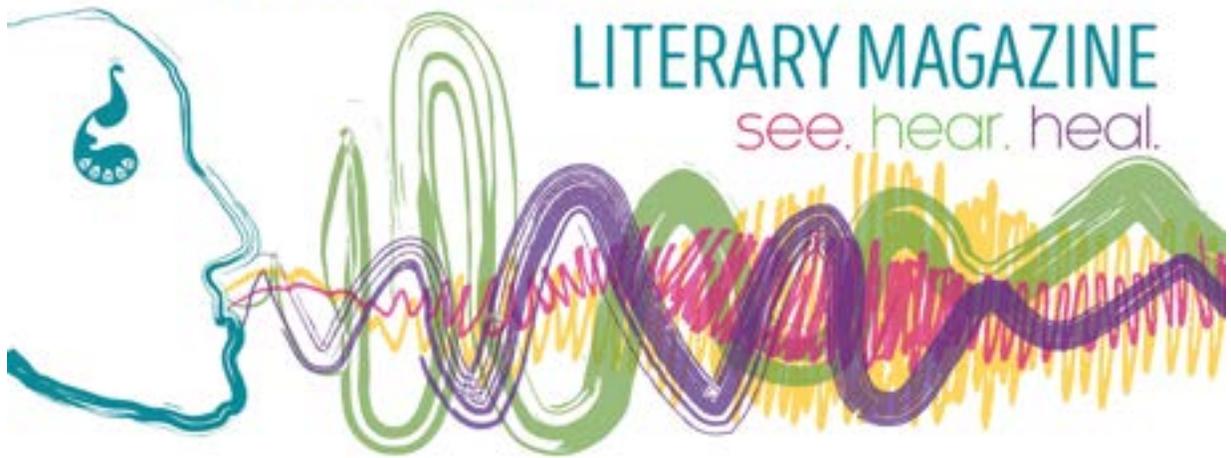


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INTRODUCTION

This issue was originally published in a blog post format and was updated to this format in 2023.

CONTENT WARNING

The following issue contains material on the topic of sexual violence and other topics that readers might find difficult.

The intention behind this content warning is to prepare a reader so they can choose to bravely engage with potentially activating material, even if this doesn't always feel comfortable. May it also serve as a reminder that a reader can pause and take a break from reading. The stories will be here, ready when the reader returns.

Tacos*Kae Bucher*

“Hi! Welcome to Taco Bell”
 she says as I walk through the door,
 so I nod and saunter to the counter
 where she waits for me to order,
 make a choice
 choose,
 know what to do

the lights on the menu behind her,
 the lights on the menu bright with failure
 over and
 over
 again
 me—with my I’ve-got-the-whole-world-in-the-
 pocket-of-my-ripped-blue-jeans look
 standing as tall as I can, as confident as I can—
 because I’m not
 my panic and me
 smiling so big I can feel my heart beat between
 my fingers
 trying to count sweaty coins
 over and over

unsure of how to order
 sure that I’ll make a mistake,
 trust him when I
 shouldn’t have
 walk through that door
 be too afraid to walk out

socks sweating, I stand before a counter
 in three-inch, high-heeled
 fake-it-til-you-make-it boots
 pulling coins out of a ripped pocket
 just like anyone else who walks through those
 double doors





I order tacos

Kae Bucher graduated from Fresno Pacific University with a Bachelor's in English and a minor in Christian Ministries and then went on to teach Special Education. As a poet, Kae has advocated for sexual abuse survivors through the Blood Into Ink poetry contest. Two of Kae's poems received honorable mentions. Kae's writing on behalf of PTSD victims occurs at www.txdisabilities.org. Kae has garnered over 800 followers on her poetry blog, www.bucketsonabarefootbeach.com, in less than a year and also co-edits Jordan Journal, a Christian literary collective.

Another Version

Manda Frederick

When he returns to collect the sweatshirt he'd left
at my apartment and ask me out to lunch,

I stand back against
the kitchen counter, knick-block

arm's-length away-though
it isn't really needed,

we were friends, once,
and because of this, I feel,

strangely, that I can confront him-
I say, "This is what happened."

He says, "You aren't the first,"
he says, "but I've never been confronted."

We were friends, once, and because of this
I want to say,

"It could have been different, you know.
It could have been warm, sober.

You could have been beside me
thought we wouldn't be touching.

It could have been August,
the quaking aspens at water's edge still,

Superior still, the gulls just-nested,
the sun just-set, sky blue as blood

In need of a breath we would not take
because, right then, nothing





Would be changing between us.
For a moment, nothing could be changing."

Plate Tectonics

Manda Frederick

i.

Though he now occupies another coast
some 3,000 miles away,
I feel his shape because I feel my own,
split from his, hot about the edges
and quaking.

ii.

Beneath this bed, I feel three stories of house
pushing up, and I think I see
one side rising without any weight
to hold it down. I wake
and it seems the whole bed trembles—
yes, it is trembling;
I later learn
this is a kind of night terror—
not the white woman
at the foot of your bed or
a dream so real you throw yourself
from a window, but stress so subterranean
in your body that your mind cannot see
it is you who causes these frightening quakes.
You turn on the light; the bed is shaking.
You strike the frame; the bed is shaking.
You call out for a ghost; the bed is shaking.
So you lay down, close your eyes,
wait for your world to come to a rest,
something sure enough to stand on.





Manda Frederick holds an M.F.A in Creative Nonfiction from the Inland Northwest Center for Writers and recently completed an MA in Literary Studies from Western Washington University. Manda has published nonfiction in the White Whale Review and Switchback magazine. Manda's essay "The Saw Tooth" was a finalist published for Adventum Magazine's 2011 Ridge to River contest, and Manda's essay "Relative Effort" was a finalist in the 2011 Press 53 Open Award for creative nonfiction. Manda's poems have appeared in: *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (Wayne State UP, 2013), *The Cancer Poetry Project*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Muse & Stone*, *Love Notes: An Anthology of Romantic Poetry* (Vagabondage Press, 2012), *Press 53 Open Awards Anthology* (Press 53, 2011), *Iron Horse Literary Review*, and *Stirring*. Manda is the winner of the 2011 Press 53 Open Award for poetry with three of her poems published in the winners' anthology.

Standing Outside the Precinct

Anonymous

It's been a month, and this is how I eat:

I wait until I am starving, my stomach rumbling with gurgling “feed me” noises, as the world gets fuzzy and I lose focus on words, language and thoughts. Be it the conventional hours of lunchtime or dinnertime, I drag myself away from my bedroom and my laptop, where I've been scrolling mindlessly through my Facebook feed, or gazing vacantly at Netflix set to auto-play all seven seasons of Gilmore Girls, and I trudge the fifteen feet to my kitchenette. Bolstering myself up with aid of the refrigerator door, I grab an apple, two carrots, and a jar of raw almond butter. I cut the apple into chunks, the carrots into sticks, and drop a heaping tablespoon of almond butter on top. I lean against the kitchen sink, force feeding myself, fighting against my will to swallow each mouthful. Tears well in my eyes as I chew. My body's biochemical systems crave food, so I oblige the mitochondria their energy source. But I do not want food. I have lost interest in food. I am unworthy of each bountiful bite. When my bowl is empty, I wash up with citrus scented dish soap, then I hover over the toilet or sink in case the meal doesn't stay down. It usually stays down. Sometimes it doesn't. But what always remains is a sharp stabbing pain in my gut that lingers despite digestive enzymes and ginger tea. I regret eating. It would be easier to just stop.

It's been a month, and this is how I sleep:

I watch my clock morph from midnight to 1a.m. to 2a.m., while my Netflix advances forward the next episode of Lorelai and Rory Gilmore's enviable rose-colored Connecticut life. I'm in the dark, and my screen emits an orange glow intended to reduce the harmful blue-light effect on our circadian rhythms. I'm lying on my side, in the fetal position, my head propped up twenty degrees by a pillow to get the best screen-viewing angle, my arms wrapped tightly around my tattered stuffed animals I still own at the age of 39, two small brown and cream-colored puppies named Thieves and Lavender in honor of healing essential oils. As my laptop's pop-up window reminds me “You are getting up in 6.5 hours,” I imagine hauling myself up from the sunken-in memory foam imprint of my body. “Up! Up up up!” my inner cheerleader shouts. I reason that with one big push, I can emerge onto my wobbly feet, and in mere ten minutes time, accomplish the most minimal of pre-bedtime rituals, and then return to my safe spot. I throw myself into the bathroom, wash my face with my hand soap, brush my teeth with Dr. Bronner's all-natural peppermint paste, and then drug myself with magnesium, melatonin, and a handful of other supplements. I flop back into bed, resuming my coveted haven, and I lie still. But I'm not still. My body is trembling. Every cell vibrates in tremors. An energetic pulse electrifies my body into fitful starts and stops. A nervous system gone



haywire, it's viscerally disturbing, disrupting, unrestful. I sleep. I wake. I sleep. I wake. I sleep. I jolt awake. It's still dark. I can't sleep anymore. It's been about four hours. I get up.

It's been a month, and this is how I work:

I'm a freelance writer and creative director. Freelance means I work from home, but I wouldn't call what I'm doing now "working." With my hair still wet from the morning shower, I sit motionless in a hard-backed red wooden chair, my right leg crossed over my left, and I turn on my laptop. My breathing is shallow as I open my personal Gmail account, then my professional Gmail account, then my personal Yahoo account, then Facebook, then Facebook Messenger, and occasionally LinkedIn when I'm at the pinnacle of self-imposed distraction. I scroll through the messages that were left for me in the four hours between night and day. I respond to no one. I open InDesign, Photoshop and Microsoft Word as a good faith gesture toward my mounting project list. Then I click back to Facebook. I text my therapist. I email a social worker. I spy a tiny red circle on my phone's message icon... I have new voice mails. I don't listen to any of them. I despise the imposition of the phone. I pick up a book. A silent and solitary activity that cannot talk back to me, I hide in typeset paragraphs, advancing 300-400 pages a day. I speak out loud to no one. I go to a local café for strong espresso. I'm forced to vocalize, "Medium almond milk latte, thank you." I

hand over my debit card. Sometimes the barista wants to chat. Words hurt, don't speak to me, that means I am expected to speak back. I return home to my work station, which remains there mocking my lack of focus. I read articles that Facebook tells me to read. I ignore incoming calls from clients. I delete messages from new connections who ask to collaborate. I subliminally tell 95% of the people in my orbit to fuck off and leave me the hell alone. At least they abide my wishes.

It's been a month, and this is how I drive:

I hop behind the wheel of my year 2000 Infinity. I initiate the engine, turn on my music, and roll out of the driveway. I have nowhere to go - no meetings, no friends within a 60-mile radius. Maybe I need to buy more apples and carrots. Or maybe I need contact solution at CVS. I space out my weekly errands in a last-ditch attempt to give myself a reason to get dressed and leave the house every day. I drive down the suburban road and circle onto the highway. No one in this historic Mid-Atlantic state knows how to merge. It's a death trap even for the most defensive driver. My mind isn't on the road, and it's especially not on the idiot who doesn't know how to speed up or slow down on a yield approach. As I swerve and brake to miss the unevolved driver, I realize my fight-or-flight response to our near-collision is not a reflection on the sanctity of my

bwn fragile life. Rather, it's a desperate anxiety that we'll crash, I'll remain objectively unharmed, but my car will be totaled, and that will be one more thing I have to deal with; one more thing I have to fix; one more thing that some reckless jackass inflicted upon me the moment I stopped being hyper-vigilant to oncoming danger, leaving me stunned, broken, a total wreck; one more thing that's not my fault, but where I remain frozen in debilitating self-blame.

It's been a month since he started emailing me about my body... to tell me I was hot, and that he found me attractive. It was initially flattering, for the first twelve hours. Who doesn't want to be desired? So, I flirted back, in wit and whimsy. I will never forgive myself for flirting back. But there it was... trapped in my brain. A repetitive mantra from my closest friends: "____. Stop cycling back into the security of romanticized heartbreak. Be open. Give some new guy a chance."

So I tried. Even though I wasn't attracted to this new guy. Even though my instinct was toward disaster. "One foot in front of the other," advised my friends. But I was the one walking there.

It's been a month since his language moved from mild flirtation to pornographic seduction. He described how he'd feel inside of me; how he'd touch me, follow my breathing, my sounds, my panting; how he'd make me feel good. He proudly

recounted that he's wider than most, he's good at sex, and his litany of former bedfellows seemed to enjoy themselves.

We barely knew each other. We met in person, three months prior at a professional event, talked for thirty minutes, exchanged business cards, then I left. A few days later, there was a follow-up business-related encounter that lasted two hours. Then I returned to my residence, 100 miles away in another state and city. This was no Weinstein episode. He held no managerial nor financial authority over me. Although, he did attempt to buy me, under the guise of feigned compassion. He offered to pay for my apartment (he knew I was bouncing around on long-term Airbnb rentals with no permanent address). He offered to hire me (he knew I had no steady income). He offered to send me home to my mom for the holidays (he knew I missed my family). I declined every offer, intuitively sensing a massive IOU behind his supposed philanthropic gestures.

Over two months, we became, what I presumed to be, acquaintances. I never even thought to ascribe the word "friend" to this man's position in my life. He lived 2.5 hours away, a space that now offers me a tenuous buffer of geographic security. From a distance, our sporadic phone and digital conversations, all at his genesis, were initially benign, friendly, professional, sometimes funny, albeit disjointed. He seemed scattered, erratic, unfocused, sometimes ringing my mobile at 2a.m.





while I was sleeping (when I used to sleep). He'd stick on a singular topic and obsess, requiring constant reassurance of his position, or his belief system, no matter what suggestions or solutions I offered to his proposed dilemma.

He called me "honey" and "darling." I presumed that to be an endearing charismatic quirk. Maybe if I had said, "Stop. My name is ____" from the very beginning, it would not have escalated. Maybe it's my fault I did nothing to halt his progression from "hey hun" to graphic descriptions of his "bulbous cock" and where he wanted my mouth.

It's been a month since he started signing his emails with his first initial attached to suggestive words like "humongous" and "bang." Since he requested I send him naked photos of how God bore me. I firmly declined, admonishing him, "I never do that. You should never do that. Trust no one online." That didn't stop him from asking twice more. He told me he couldn't concentrate on his work, "thinking of my hot smokin' body." He wished me good night and told me to "dream of his soft wet lips." He swapped the word "cum" for "come" in his text messages. He asked me to never tell our mutual colleagues about our communication, to keep this confidential between us. I agreed, despite overtones of a pedophile uncle violating his naïve niece, "Don't tell mommy and daddy, ok? It's our little secret." I'll be punished if I tell mommy and daddy. He

confessed to me about a revenge fantasy he had from the minute he met me – an ultimate screw-you to his former female business partner, that he'd seduce me to work for him every day and fuck him every night.

Only 24 hours into his aggressive pursuit, I sensed I was in trouble, drowning, I wanted out. I attempted to extricate myself with verbose niceties and emotive descriptors about my essence, my identity. "I may be hot," I said, "But I'm just a really REALLY nice person!" I explained my history of confusing relationships – that I fall in love with men who care about me, but never sexualize me. That I was still healing from heartbreak, and I had a lot to sort through. That I did the casual thing only once before, ten years prior, with a guy friend I'd known for a while. It ended in catastrophe. I've learned not to repeat such mistakes. I explained about my neurological disorder, and how it makes me sensitive, "and I mean that literally, sexually," and why no casual "let's fuck" dynamic will ever properly tend to my body. I told him that I'd be more than happy to meet him for coffee the next time I was in his city, but "I cannot do any of the things you're describing inside the bedroom without love, respect, and care outside the bedroom. And all of that evolves slowly over time." He said my offer for coffee was a blow-off. I explained, "As far as I'm concerned, if a man doesn't want to know me over conversation in a coffee shop, he's never

gonna know me naked in his bed.”

I thought my messages were transparent and sincere. But his chase continued. I didn’t realize my words became a challenge, taunting him, teasing him. I did not recognize that his fantasy had transformed into reality.

It’s been three weeks since I sent him a clearly articulated, succinct email that read, “This dialogue is making me uncomfortable, stressed, and anxious. I would like this to stop. We can only communicate as platonic friends and professional colleagues. Ok?” He called me immediately, and without reproach nor interrogation, he kindly agreed to cease and turn back time before this line of demarcation was crossed. I felt relieved. Empowered. I had handled a difficult situation with grace and clarity. My therapist was proud of me.

It’s been two weeks since he called me on a Monday night at 10p.m., sending me a link to a recent video interview he filmed, begging me, “Do you think I’m hot and sexy? Tell me you think I’m hot and sexy.” Anxious and caught off guard, I deflected conversation. No, I did not think he was hot or sexy. I thought he was too old for me. He had a Neanderthal aura, which seemed repulsively animalistic to me. I asked him about his work instead. He responded, “Will you please come visit me, so we can have sex?” He considered my nervous laughter fodder for his sexual excitement.

I awakened to this singular fact: it didn’t matter what I said or did. He was aroused just by the sound of my voice, the letters of my name, the tension of my resistance, and the energy of our cellular connections pinging back and forth.

“We talked about this. Remember?” I beseeched.

“I know. I gave you a week. Week’s up,” he intoned.

There. Right there. That’s the exact moment when I started to feel unsafe; threatened by his diabolically careful choice of objectively non-threatening words, which left me questioning if I had any personal right to be affronted; if I had any legal authority to cite harassment.

“It doesn’t work that way,” I said. But he reveled in the game of my protestations. Ten minutes later, I hung up on him, vowing to never answer his calls nor messages again. And I remained wide-eye awake all night, mad at myself for not recording that conversation.

It’s been a week since he emailed me to explicitly describe his sexual fantasies about me. “I dreamed we had such good sex that you’re no longer sick,” he wrote. Getting off on his delusions, he accused, “Look at what you do to me.” And he asked again for naked photos.

My hands trembled. My bladder went into a traumatic spasm. My lungs haven’t taken a full breath since. My self-imposed code of strict radio-silence subsequently brought an onslaught



of messages in the 24 hours that followed – phone calls, voice mails, emails – baiting me, playing me. “I’m sad. I miss talking to you. Call me. Are you really not talking to me?” With my nerves and synapses on fire, after my umpteenth conversation with a social worker, I wrote him what I’d hoped to be my final email. “Stop. This communication is inappropriate and making me uncomfortable. Please stop. Permanently.”

It’s been a month since I stopped speaking, stopped writing, stopped working, stopped smiling, stopped laughing, stopped living, stopped caring, stopped sleeping, stopped breathing, stopping hoping, stopped dreaming. My friends remind me that I’m a writer. They say inane things that belong on a women’s march placard, like “Don’t let him silence your voice. Take back your power.” They want to know why I won’t “take him down” publicly. To write something. To publish something. To join my #MeToo sisters. They send me articles about Aziz Ansari and the USA Gymnastics Team. They tell me to read The New Yorker fiction piece “Cat Person.” They tell me I’m brave, I’ve already overcome so much in my life, that I’m “the strongest person they know,” that this won’t end me, that I cannot let this pathetic abusive predatory man destroy me. They tell me I drew a line, I used my voice to say “Stop.” That’s the most important part. Not that I naively engaged back for a split-second in time. But that I said stop, several times, and he didn’t

listen.

It’s been five days since he texted me at 2a.m., “R u awake?”

From the second we met, he knew how to seduce me with kindness. To instill trust. And openness. The malignant narcissist and his empathic mirror. He knew how to make me comfortable with him, to trap me, and then to break me down in guilt and shame for allowing myself to be trapped.

It’s been four days since I called a domestic abuse hotline.

It’s almost cliché, but I blame myself. For sharing with him, for allowing him to call me pet names, for laughing, for taking his calls, for responding to his emails, for being witty, for being open, for being nice. It’s my fault for wanting attention, and for being blind to what type of attention he was giving me. It’s my fault for noticing red flags and not running away until they exploded into scarlet blazing flames.

It’s been 24 hours since his last three voice mails, begging, pleading, “_____. Don’t do this. Talk to me. Why are you doing this? We have a history. Come back to me. Ya know, you flirted too. Just sayin’... I was just having a little adult fun. Aren’t you overreacting?”

My friends send me links to domestic abuse hotlines, sexual abuse crisis centers, and suicide hotlines. They text me, “Hey, checking in. How are you today?” I don’t answer. They advise me to

protect myself, know my rights, to file a police report, to hire a lawyer. They insist that I find a way to calm my body, escape to an ashram, go for a hike, drink some tea, watch a YouTube video on happiness, practice mindfulness, take care of myself. They tell me I can stop this... that I have the power to stop this.

It's been 12 hours since I emailed him: "Please respect the firm boundary I am drawing. Never contact me again."

It's been 6 hours since his next email...

It's been 5 hours since his next email...

It's been 30 minutes since his next email...



Not Home

Ashley Sapp

remember - will you - remember
the way the lightning scarred
the sky
while you scarred me, so quiet and unnoticed, these things I must have asked for,
must have.
I dug myself out of the grave, tripped over the headstone that remarked upon my life.

In case you have forgotten, in case
in case you have kept going, in case I am a trophy - remember me,
won't you?

I am a body, limbs askew
voiceless as I am consentless,
but a body,
worthy of choosing, of using, so I suppose
I should thank you for exerting your power
and for telling me of my choice
-after.
reconstruct my life,
I will,
because who am I? you like to tell me.

"remember it this way."

Whispers shake the brain cells, thunder echoes in these bones.
these ribs are not a home. my home was
flooded, washed away.
debris knocking upon the walls, pushing,
giving way.
scattered are my things, the parts of the
whole.
now mold encases where life once thrived,
what was rotting into what is.

remember - do you - the way I felt,
because try as I might,
I cannot,
and my body is not my own,
it is not my home.

Ashley Sapp resides in Columbia, South Carolina, with her husband and furbaby. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of South Carolina in 2010 and has written for various publications. Her work has previously appeared in Indie Chick, Topsy Lit, and the Yellow Chair Review. She is a bibliophile who enjoys traveling, tattoos, and a good pun or two (or three). *Wild Becomes You* is Ashley's first poetry collection.



Landscape with Written Statement

Lynn Melnick

You wrap my ribs in gauze -
an experiment with the word *tenderly*
after your hands left my vocal cords too bruised to speak.

While winter sun squints at the ghost flower
dying in its shabby terra cotta

far from home

men tell me to be honest about my role in the incident:

Okay, yes
I should have stayed inside

while you railed from the sidewalk

but my confused heart got in the car.

What happened is
I once spent too much time in the desert

so pogonip seems glamorous hung in the trees
like when blood dries on skin

and I want to wear it

out for an evening,
pat my hands over its kinky path down my face

because: fuck you,

you didn't find me here.
I brought you here

Reprinted with permission from *Landscape with Sex and Violence* (YesYes Books, 2017)

Lynn Melnick is the author of the poetry collections *Landscape with Sex and Violence* and *If I Should Say I Have Hope*, and the co-editor of *Please Excuse This Poem: 100 Poets for the Next Generation*. Her poetry has appeared in *APR*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *A Public Space*, and elsewhere. A 2017–2018 fellow at the New York Public Library’s Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, she also serves on the Executive Board of *VIDA: Women in Literary Arts*.



What Happens Later – Sometimes, Much Later

Shawn Aveningo Sanders

One Sunday
 you're watching football on TV—
 some team you don't normally pay attention to
 and suddenly
 out of the blue
 you hear *the* name

The one who raped you
 (the one you trusted, the one you knew).
 He has one of those all-too-common names
 like John Smith
 or Jim Walters or Bob Brown
 and yet it's still a name
 you haven't heard in almost a decade

And there it is
 again
 rolling off the tongue of the announcer
 emblazoned
 in bright white letters
 on a dark purple jersey
 that name—
 the new starting quarterback
 this team's new hope for glory

Touchdown!
 You hear his name again
 blasting now in surround sound
 You knock over a beer bottle
 drop the 7-layer dip
 spill the football shaped bowl of tortilla chips
 and tremble

While everyone cheers
you quietly clean up the mess
hope no one notices
or bothers to ask

Are you okay?

Shawn Aveningo Sanders is a globally published, award-winning poet who can't stand the taste of coconut, eats pistachios daily and loves shoes ... especially red ones! (redshoepoet.com) Shawn's work has appeared in over 100 literary journals and anthologies. She's a Pushcart nominee, Best of the Net nominee, co-founder of The Poetry Box®, managing editor for The Poeming Pigeon®, and was named Best Female Poet-Performer in Sacramento News & Review Reader Poll in 2009. Shawn is a proud mother of three and shares the creative life with her husband in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon. Shawn is a survivor of rape.



The Men Who Didn't Rape Me

AK Krajewska

My second boyfriend was a sociopath
but he didn't rape me, not even when
I changed my mind just as he reached beneath
the pillow to grab a prophylactic.
The businessman who cheated on his wife
and got me drunk on cheap red wine, and took
me to his rented Wall Street hotel suite
also didn't. One no sufficed for him.
And in the morning in my clubbing boots,
my fishnets and my smudged Egyptian kohl,
I walked against the stream of work-bound suits.
A dozen or more of these scoundrels, these drunks
and lechers and druggies who all did not rape me,
unlike my clean-cut, sober boyfriend.

Agnieszka Krajewska is a poet, essayist, and combat epistemologist. She received an MA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University in 2004, and was ordained as an Adept in the Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn in 2009. Her poems have appeared in two chapbooks, *Water Breaking* (Ye Olde Fonte Shoppe, 1997) and *Residual Heat* (Self-published, 2014). She lives in San Francisco, California.



Like Every Good Boy I Look Forward to Meeting My (the) Rapist

Akpa Arinzechukwu

& suddenly yesterday I stopped being twenty.
I am tired of being found alive.

It was night a minute ago.
I keep losing my head –

Surprised it is always found in the refrigerator:
Citalopram-stench, blueprints of L.

Last night I was so old I could only do one thing:
Trailed the lady that taught me how to use my penis,

Bought us a drink, held her hands in my palms,
Searched for God & even though she had grown old now

She was still willing to teach me again
In case I'd forgotten what I learned at nine.

You don't mind, milady?
I like my Ds young, she smiled.

Every minute about 25 million stars die.
They end up on earth, as dusts, maybe or

In space, maybe, still floating, gathering
Hydrogen, helium, et al, like the woman,

Waiting to be born again –
I don't know my science well.

I struggle too understanding God: how
He could go in & out of Mary without permission,

Caught but never brought to books.
Last night when the city lights came down,



My head was out of the refrigerator again. I kissed her goodnight
& set the house on fire; none of us survived.

AAkpa Arinzechukwu is a Nigerian dealing with his numerous identities. His work has been published by or featured in the 2017 Best New African Poets anthology, Sou'wester, Transition, London Grip Poetry, Eastlit, ITCH, New Contrast, The Flash Fiction Press, The Rising Phoenix Review, Packingtown Review and elsewhere. He was a finalist for the Sophia May Poetry Contest and longlisted for the Koffi Addo Prize for Creative Nonfiction. He is the author of the poetry chapbook, CITY DWELLERS (Splash of Red Press).

When He Asks You For A Character Reference

Mary Panke

the nice guy who comes into your home to clean your windows the friendly doctor who brings
mushrooms from the woods

the puffed priest who eats your mother's coffee cake
drinks your father's wine hears your confession

the lonely softball coach who shows up at your soccer games to tell you
he wants you on his team
come springtime

the nice guy
who smiles too much at the gas pump
hugs you on the streets of New York
is called president of all things
when he asks you
in his office his van his vestibule
when he turns off the lights blocks the door
gives you a drink to relax
leans too close
to help with your seatbelt
your shopping cart
offers you
a recommendation a reassignment a raise
a million bucks even
holds up two fingers
tells you it is one
bends the rules breaks the rules makes the rules
promises to tell not to tell
your parents your partner your children
comments on the size of you
asks how old you are
asks why you think you are
worth his time his attention
and then assures you
you are





maybe someday
if he says so if he feels like it
he goes out of his way not to touch you
his hands as big as the moon
always forcing himself
under your skin into your brain
thoughts you would never think
images you would never see
if not for him if not for him
who makes so much does so much promises so much good in the world writes books treats disease
feeds children bestows blessings
enforces laws grants loans claims discoveries
his character beyond question no one can
possibly believe the hideous charge
he is the center of the universe
you are a clump of dirt
an orbiting body
an unlucky
mote in
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ISSUE 6: A DAY IN THE LIFE
OF A SURVIVOR

untouched

Bina Perino

i will cleanse my body
of unwanted fingerprints
in a scalding shower.
skin will split, melt, peel
and water will run
with the red, red, red
of my blood until i
am tissue and bone.
and a blanket of flesh
will hold me until i awake
and become somebody
you never touched.

Bina Perino is a student at the University of North Texas. She plans on teaching high school English after completing her Bachelor's. She is a survivor of sexual assault.



Cover My Eyes, Cover Your Eyes With Dirt

Cris Iacoponi

When you ask my why I hurt

I lie.

Fold the truth in my lap

Sweet friend let me be a

mother to every queer I've

ever loved will you let me

cover your eyes?

When you ask me why I hurt I lie nestled under down and straw. Picture this there's a man. Watch him fill his fingers with feathers, hold a chicken upside down while she stills he lays her down and swings his axe.

When you ask my why I hurt I Lie weightless under a brown couch

Picture this a man fills his fingers with a child's hair, pulls her towards him and throws her upside down. He takes a fire poker and swings it three times:

One She does not scream.

Two Something inside her body cracks.

Three She does not scream (She goes to school the next day).

She's grown up, goes to work the next day. Writes essay titles on trains. *On being Ill -*

On Being Ill And Surviving Under Capitalism -

On Being Ill and Pretending to Survive Under Capitalism -

On Being Ill and Not Smiling Enough -

On Being Ill and Intensely Lonely and Restocking Scarves and Not Smiling Enough -

On being Ill and Scared for Her Friends and Not Smiling Enough -

On Staying Up Shoveling Soil In A Deep Deep Hole but Either It Doesn't Fill Or Maybe The Emptiness Isn't Physical but -

How Can I Be So Hollow While Filled with So Much Dark Dark Earth and- Not Smiling Enough.

Enter the picture where I'm eating cheezits at the pool.

Sun and chlorine makes the nose remember smiling.

Exit please before a hand larger than my head reaches up my skirt.

Enter the picture here. On my back, looking up at a mobile in a green room. Calm.
Exit before a hand larger than my head reaches down and breaks my toe. Maybe this is the first time
It won't be the last time.
I don't know, Did you exit in time?
Did you let me cover your eyes?

Cris is a survivor of early and long term sexual abuse.
It's a relief for Cris to be able to write this so plainly to
a literary/art magazine. Cris grew up in Texas, moved
to New York, and has settled down in Philadelphia. Cris
is queer, a poet, can design a great logo, and clean
bathtub spotless.



Back To School The Day After

Margaret DeRitter

Everything on campus looks the same,
but I'm viewing it from underwater.

I shake my head to clear my vision.
All I see is a mask and eyes.

I swim toward the surface, gasp for air.
Where the hell am I?

How could I critique pure reason today?
Or parse the lines of Paradise Lost?

It's all a big joke. What I need is a life rope.
Someone, please, pull me to shore.

Margaret DeRitter is a journalist and poet who lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan, with her dog, Murray. Her home was invaded by two men in 1978, and she and her college friends were raped that night. She has written a chapbook on the subject that she is hoping to get published. Her poetry has appeared in New Verse News, The 3288 Review, Pocket Change, Melancholy Hyperbole, Midnight Circus and Scarlet Literary Magazine and is forthcoming in the anthology *Surprised by Joy* (Wising Up Press).

The Silence and the Scream

Dana Robbins

Thirty years later,
the memories come roaring back,
in burning waves, like a stomach flu.

Memories come unbidden when I am on
the subway, in Macy's buying pajamas
or taking my children to school.

The secrets I could not tell
are the bile that collects
in the back of my throat.

They are the meal I can't digest.
They are the voice that drops off
at the end of a sentence.

They are always with me, hiding,
muttering obscenities,
peeking out from behind
the smiling face of a stranger
whose teeth are just a little

too big. They are there
in strange smells that cling,
in menace rising from
the gingery hair
on a man's arm.

They were my silence —
They are my scream.





Following a long career as a lawyer, **Dana** obtained an MFA through the Stonecoast Writers program. Dana's first book, *The Left Side of My Life*, was published by Moon Pie Press in 2015. Dana's poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including *Muddy River Poetry Review*, the *Paterson Literary Review*, *Drunken Boat*, and the *Fish Anthology*. Dana's poem, "To My Daughter Teaching Science", was featured by Garrison Keillor on the *Writer's Almanac*. Dana is a proud survivor of childhood sexual abuse. Dana was honored to have the poem, "The Liar", published by *Awakened Voices* in May 2017.

you too*Rebecca Burke*

You lie still when he finishes. He doesn't say anything at first. Just stills his hands and pulls back. He sits up. I'm sorry. I crossed a line. I shouldn't have done that. I should've asked first. His words are flat, monotonous. You don't think he means them. He won't look at you.

He stands, pulls his shorts on, tugs his t-shirt over his head, and leaves you lying there naked and cold. The sheets are bunched up by your feet, but you don't reach for them as you once would have. Paralyzed by fear, the acrid taste of terror bitter on your tongue. Your breathing's ragged. Your skin feels rough and raw, chaffed from his scratchy beard and his rough insistence. It's not the first time he's done this, far from it. But it's the first time he's been so callous afterwards. Usually he'd break down and apologize and cry and make you feel guilty, so fucking guilty for not saying yes.

Somehow, this is worse.

He's not gone long, maybe five minutes. You can hear the door open and close downstairs. The dull whir of the fan overhead hums in your ears. You stare at the ceiling. His footsteps pound on the stairs, heavy. He only let his dogs out. Get dressed, he says when he pushes the bedroom door open. When you don't move, don't speak, don't do anything, he grabs your clothes off the floor and throws them at you, too hard to be playful. The button of your jeans stings on contact. You've gotta get to class, remember?

Right. Class. You're supposed to watch Frost-Nixon and take notes before your test next week. Your professor takes points off if you're not there, even for the movie days. Last class you need to graduate; can't mess it up this late in the game.

He moves to make you sit up, to force your clothes over your head like a damn doll. Coupled with a surge of urgency, it's enough to get you up, to pull away from him and dress yourself and grab your backpack. You don't speak to him while he walks with you.

He doesn't say anything either. He's never silent, always has to find some way to fill the space between you with chatter. He'd usually ask about the plan for your family vacation this year—he's invited along—or otherwise ramble about his job at the movie theater, some manga he's reading, complain how inconsiderate his parents can be when they get up in the morning. He doesn't like dead air, the way it builds up between you both until it's suffocating. Like it is now.

*

You hold your phone in your hands. It's a beautiful July afternoon, all green grass and blue skies and yellow sun, without that oppressive suburban-D.C. humidity common this time of year. After Frost-Nixon, you find a quiet spot on campus, half in the sun, half not, where you can be alone. Where you can think. Your mind hasn't



turned off in the last five hours, running in never-ending circles. You feel like you might be sick from the building headache.

You spend an hour debating what to say; nothing seems right. There's no right way to approach this. But of all your friends, Max will understand the best. Max will know what to do. Your fingers tremble as you type out the words, Max, I need to tell you something awful and I need your help. He is always quick to respond, to offer support and whatever else he can give, even though he is hundreds of miles away in Iowa. But you can't get the words out, you can't own up to them. So you sugarcoat it. You pad the reality with soft phrases and vague sentences. Make it sound like you're asking for help with a friend who never listens to what you have to say. You're scared of how he'll react to the truth.

But Max's advice is sound, as always is: Talk to him. You won't get anywhere unless you talk to him.

*

That night, anxiety gnaws at your stomach and keeps you awake while your mind cartwheels. You can barely focus during work the next day, a dangerous habit for a lifeguard. You yell at running little kids and make sure they don't drown during the swim meet, but for the life of you, you can't remember which team won or lost. When you finally get home and shower, you've run out of stall tactics. You fiddle with your

phone, curled on your side in your favorite blue recliner, your head pillowed on the armrest, your knees drawn in to your chest. Your mom is only feet away, completely oblivious.

Max is right, you tell yourself. This is a conversation that needs to be had.

Your shaking thumbs type out, We need to talk about yesterday.

His reply is immediate, like he'd been hovering by his phone and waiting to pounce—we do.

You crossed a line yesterday—deep breath, rattling in your lungs, before you hit send and watch the little speech bubble pop up on the screen, bright blue. His own words, repeated back to him. You want to run away and hide and protect whatever parts of yourself he hasn't shattered, but those parts don't exist anymore. You close your eyes and wait for his response. The conversation devolves into his typical self-deprecation, weaving your fear into guilt and regret. I'm horrible. I'm bad. I'm an abuser, he writes. Do you think we should break up? That scares you more than anything—you were going to spend forever with him. That's what he said. You're stuck with me. We're soulmates. Deal with it.

You can't break up. You can't.

You tell him you want to fix things, that there are aspects of the relationship worth saving. The way he listens to you, like when you ramble on for hours about work or a book you're reading or

some stupid movie you caught on TV. The gentleness with which he treats your autistic cousin. How he looks at you like you're the greatest thing to ever happen to him. The three years you've spent building something meaningful with another person, a person that has always seemed to just get you. Well, except your aversion to sex, he's never understood that. But surely those things, the good things, are worth saving? Surely he could come to understand your boundaries, even after he's ignored them so many times? It started innocently enough, after all. He backed off after the first time he asked to have sex, when you broke down crying that you weren't ready. Only started pushing for more months later. But then pushing turned to begging, and the begging wore you down. Over nearly two years, it wore you into the ground. When he finally got what he really wanted, you were too withered to assert your boundaries yet again.

But if you had, at some point in the year since then, he would have listened. Would have stopped. Realized his mistake. That's what you tell yourself, anyway. You're good at convincing yourself of these things. So good, in fact, that you're willing to give him one more chance. He

says he wants to fix things, to rebuild the broken trust between you. He wants to be better for you. You go upstairs to your bed, not sure if you believe him.

*

Sitting in Sophie's recently-renovated kitchen over a month later, you laugh about something she and her friends got up to at William & Mary. Some party they went to, how high they got. You're smiling and nodding along as she waves her hands emphatically, but you're only half paying attention. You want to tell her what's been going on—you just don't know how. She's your best friend—has been since you played field hockey together in high school—you can tell her anything. You want to. But your throat feels tight as you sip on water, wishing you were better at these things. You're breaking inside, sharp edges tearing you apart every time you breathe.

You leave Sophie's house right at six thirty. Your heart pounds the whole drive home. A few tears creep down your cheeks when you pull on to your street. But it's not hard to wipe your eyes and put a bright smile on when you walk in the door and greet your parents. You've done this many times before.



You finish dinner to find three text messages from Sophie. The first thanks you for coming over. The second includes a picture of Sophie snuggling with one of her cats. The third is full of concern, saying you seemed distant and she wants to make sure you're okay.

You don't know how to respond. Of course Sophie noticed something was off. She's always been able to read your moods better than almost anyone. You thank her for having you over. You wish her well on her upcoming semester at school. And then, slowly, you type out that you want to tell her something, something you've never told anyone.

She's gentle, gives you space and asks probing questions. She seems to know, intuitively, your boyfriend is the root of your troubles and starts there. It doesn't take long for the whole story to come tumbling forth, a dam bursting inside you as your thumbs fly over the screen of your phone, first answering her questions and then telling her more, more, everything you can get out.

You're seized by a desire for someone to know, for someone to understand, for someone to tell you what to do, because you're not sure you can live like this anymore.

And Sophie offers those things. It's not my place to make your decisions, she says. But do you think you would be better off without him? He's hurt you so badly, but it's for you to decide. If you want to fix things with him, I will respect

that too. But is that really the best option? Take your time and think about it. You don't need to have an answer right now. She finishes with, Thank you for telling me these things. I'm here to support you, whatever you need.

Her words rattle around in your head. Breaking up seems more and more like the only way to protect yourself. But you're not sure you have it in you. You've never been good with confrontation. You cower and cry and never get a word in edgewise, especially with him. He won't look at you and says his part—I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that, I'm a bad person, stop saying you're broken I can't hear that—and thinks that's all that matters. You know if this happens, he's going to say his piece and you'll never get the chance to share yours.

Sophie suggests writing him a letter. You consider it, but you need more time. You need to think. It's so much to think about.

*

You wake early Sunday morning, gasping for air in the throes of a panic attack. Clutching your quilt, you roll over and bury your face in your pillow. Your huddled, naked body prone on his bed sears in your mind. Him hovering over you, his nails clawing at you, the heat of his bare skin pressed against as much of you as he can touch. His lips tickle your ear as he growls, Unless you tell me no, I'm going to do whatever I want. And then the force with which he—no, no, no, don't



think about that. His voice still rings in your ears. You ache in every part of your body. Once you can think a little clearer, when his voice isn't quite so loud, you text Max, praying he's already awake. You tell him everything, as best you can. He understands quickly what you're trying to say. He tells you Sophie is right. You need to break up with your boyfriend. He understands you're not ready. You cry and thank him, over and over again, for being so kind and wonderful when he doesn't have to be. He says it's nothing, you needed him and he wants to help—you're friends, that's what friends do.

You push back your comforter and cover the ten steps from your bed to the bathroom. You blanch at the bags under your eyes, the way your tank top hangs off you in ways it didn't months ago. Your stomach twists. The constant panic has taken its toll. You've lost sleep, you haven't been eating. You can't keep living like this, you decide, studying your hunched and trembling reflection. You need to break up with him. You need to save yourself.

It doesn't take long. That morning—after a breakfast you barely tasted, your heart still shuddering and hands quaking from the

aftershocks of that panic attack—he texts you, asking what's wrong. You haven't been acting right, and he's worried about you.

You write that you can't do this anymore.

He thinks you mean Dungeons and Dragons. He thinks you're worried about playing tonight. He thinks you're flaking on the game he's so excited about running. He tells you he cares about you. That you can tell him anything. Your parents are out back, pulling weeds and throwing a ball for the dogs to chase. So you let your trembles devolve into shuddering sobs.

That's not what you mean, you type. You can't do this anymore. This relationship. You can't keep having nightmares of him hurting you. You can't keep waking up in the midst of panic attacks. You don't want to live like this anymore. You don't want to be scared anymore. But you don't want to lose him. You want to fix things. Really fix them.

But even over text, he's not listening to what you're saying.

A relationship shouldn't make you feel like this. Don't you agree? You shake as you type out that you do.



And it's over. Just like that. He used to threaten to break up whenever you wouldn't tell him you loved him. He'd corner you and guilt you into begging for his forgiveness. You know he means this, but you don't know how you feel. There's so many things you wish you'd said. You hold yourself together long enough to drive over to Sophie's house, before you collapse into her bed and cry until your head pounds and aches as much as your chest does.

Halfway through Sophie trying to cheer you up, an idea strikes you. You need to get all your stuff back from him. You accept his offer to come over to his house on Tuesday, and though you break down crying again when you drive home, you're able to feel a little better about yourself. You don't let yourself hope, but you don't want to give up without talking through this. In person. What kind of person breaks up with someone over text, anyway? Insubstantial words on a glass screen mean nothing. And that's what you're really scared of, isn't it? That all of this really is meaningless to him. Maybe if you can just talk to him... he'll at least convince you otherwise.

*

You follow Sophie's advice. You write a letter, use it to convey every last ounce of how much you love him, the words flowing on paper like they never seem to with your voice. And as soon as he opens it, you curl in a ball around your purse, on the couch right next to his front door— he didn't

even invite you in properly, to the comfier living room downstairs.

He reads the letter and puts it down on his coffee table. It's pouring rain outside. You can't tell which is louder—your sobs or the pounding of rain on concrete beyond the picture window behind you.

He won't look at you. His eyes are glued straight ahead. His words ring hollow in your ears—I don't love you anymore. I think it is best we break up.

The whole ordeal lasts less than twenty minutes. You take your things and drive home. You text Sophie. You text Max. You text your mom that he won't be coming to the beach with you next week. It's not until later, until the sadness fades to numbness and the anger begins to set in, that his words really hit you. I don't love you anymore. But he still did all those things to you... without any sort of excuse to hide behind. Your anger burns hot and deep. Anger at him, for all the ways he made you feel guilty, for all those sweet whispered words that tugged at your conscience and pulled you in closer even though they meant nothing. Nothing, absolutely nothing, so long as he got what he wanted in the end. He always got what he wanted, whether you said yes or not.

And anger at yourself for letting it happen. Your relationship lasted three years. You're afraid to admit how he buried himself deep inside

your mind, how his grip was so hard to wiggle out of. How you told yourself everything was fine, because that meant it was easier for you to get through each day.

It takes a few weeks. But you find a routine, once you start lifeguarding at an indoor recreation center and you have therapy on Fridays. It's slow going. This new therapist doesn't pick or pry too quickly, letting you advance at your own rate and discuss small new pieces in time instead of all at once. You were right—the weight of all he did to you was too much for to bear on your own. At least now you have someone to share it with.

*

It's your birthday. October sixth. Your friends are throwing you a small party at their apartment—you're the last in your friend group to turn twenty-two, and they want to celebrate. You get there at seven o' clock, almost on the dot.

Your ex-boyfriend was invited, too. They were his friends first, after all. Erica wanted the whole group together for this, just like old times. He shows up ten minutes late, while you're complaining to Erica about studying for the GRE. Ian lets him in. He doesn't say a word, not even hi,

just slinks down in a chair pulled up to the card table and hides behind his phone. Erica's roommate, Xander, just looks at him, then looks at you, and shrugs, not knowing what to say.

You haven't told them what he did to you. You're not ready for everyone to know, and besides, how could you? After almost every gam night or party he'd say, Soon enough they won't want to hang out with me anymore. Just you. I always get left out in the end. You don't want to take what few friends he has away from him. He's sitting at the far end of the table, and still won't speak. Xander is the next to try to tease out some sort of response, then Erica, to no avail. The air sits heavy across the table as you all fidget and shrug and scramble for something to say. Xander stands and disappears into one of the bedrooms, returning with an unwrapped box in hand. He drops it on the table in front of you and says he was going to give this to you after dinner, but there's no point in waiting. Happy birthday. It's a box of the new Magic: The Gathering set that came out last week. You divvy up the thirty-six packs of cards as equally as you can among the five of you gathered around the table.





You all set to opening them, like you do every time a new set comes out. At the far end of the table, he cracks the packs with mechanical efficiency, sorting through the cards and laying them out in front of him in ordered piles. You take your time, reading through each card before you sort them. Your piles aren't as neat. Around the table, Erica and Xander and Ian enthuse over the cards they've pulled. But the atmosphere is muted. There's no squeals of excitement over some rare card, no gasping over the shimmer of a foil print.

Xander tries to ask him about work. Asks him about his apartment search. Tries anything to get him to talk. But the silence from his end of the table grows thick, and as you rip open your final pack, you try to find something to say. Something to talk about. You come up empty.

Erica grabs her cell phone from an end table to call to check on the pizza she ordered over an hour ago. She disappears into the kitchen, her voice low on the phone even though it doesn't have to be. Xander picks up their dog, shuts her in the bathroom. It's just you, and Ian, and your ex-boyfriend at the table, sorting through cards until Ian asks you—just you—if you want to come see his band play sometime. You don't even have time to answer. On Ian's left, your ex-boyfriend stands, he just stands, grabs his bag and walks past you, down the short hallway. You lean to the right in your chair slightly, your mouth opening,

partly in shock and partly to call after him, and watch as he slips his shoes on, opens the door, and leaves.

You look at Ian, half out of his chair, ready to chase after him.

Erica thanks the pizza place on her phone, comes back from the kitchen, asks where he went.

You and Ian both shrug and say you don't know.

She holds up her hand. Says she'll text him. You remind yourself you haven't told them what he did to you. They think this is just any other break-up. Normal.

Her phone lights up a minute later. Erica reads it, frowns, shows it to Xander, then passes it over the table for you and Ian to read. I'm a bad person. Don't talk to me. This is the last you'll hear from me. Followed by, Stop texting me.

Erica offers to call the cops, to let them deal with him. But you shake your head. If he's planning to hurt himself, that would only push him over the edge. His next text only seems to confirm that. You all will be better off without me anyway.

He said those same sorts of things when you were dating, all the time. You're the best thing that ever happened to me. I'm nothing without you. If we break up I'll probably kill myself. I can't imagine living without you.

Erica's hand hovers over her phone, debating



calling the police. But instead, she stands and grabs her car keys. He's going home, she hopes. She promises to go after him, make sure he's safe.

You're at a loss. Fear for his life, anger for how's he's treated you, how he's hurt you, bubble under your skin. Your mind whirls. But this isn't your place. Not anymore. He did this to himself. He abused you. He raped you. You don't owe him a damn thing. Your shoulders shake a little. But your words are steady when they tumble out of your mouth before she turns for the door. "Good luck."

Rebecca Burke resides in the greater Washington DC metro area. She graduated from George Mason University, and will be returning in the fall to pursue her MFA in creative writing. She is committed to using her voice to speak up for sexual assault survivors. You Too is her first published piece, with further work forthcoming in the Same. You can follow her on Twitter @BeccaBurke95.

#metoo*Wilderness Sarchild*

I know a woman
who knows what it means
to be held down by
ten boys and raped
repeatedly,
who didn't tell anyone
for twenty years.

I know a woman
who knows what it means
to have her girlfriend's
father slide his finger up
her thigh at the kitchen table,
who didn't tell anyone
for thirty years
and then it just felt like
too much time had passed
and he really didn't do anything,
anyway, not like the man
in the woods where she
was walking five years later.

I know a woman
who knows what it means
to be visited at night
by her father, how she
stayed quiet, hoping
her sister in the next bed
wouldn't wake up
and become his next
victim, who didn't tell
anyone for 35 years,
still believing he would
kill her. When
he died last year,



she finally confided
in her sister,
who knew exactly
what she meant.

I know a woman
who knows what it means
to be groped by a boss,
patted on the ass by
a customer, fired
for not acquiescing
to him, or him or him.

After 10, 20, 30 years
she is speaking up
and he and he and he
are finally getting
their balls busted.

#NoMore

#OneBillionRising

Wilderness Sarchild is the author of a full-length poetry collection, “Old Women Talking,” published by Passager Books, and the co-author of “Wrinkles, the Musical”, a play about women and aging that had its World Premiere at the Cape Cod Theatre Company (CCTC) in 2017 and will return to CCTC in 2018. She has won awards for her poetry and play writing from Veterans for Peace, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Chicago’s Side Project Theatre Company, and the Joe Gouveia WOMR National Poetry competition, judged by Marge Piercy. Wilderness is also an expressive arts psychotherapist, social justice activist, and consultant/teacher of skills in conflict resolution, consensus decision making, mediation, and meeting facilitation.

Trust

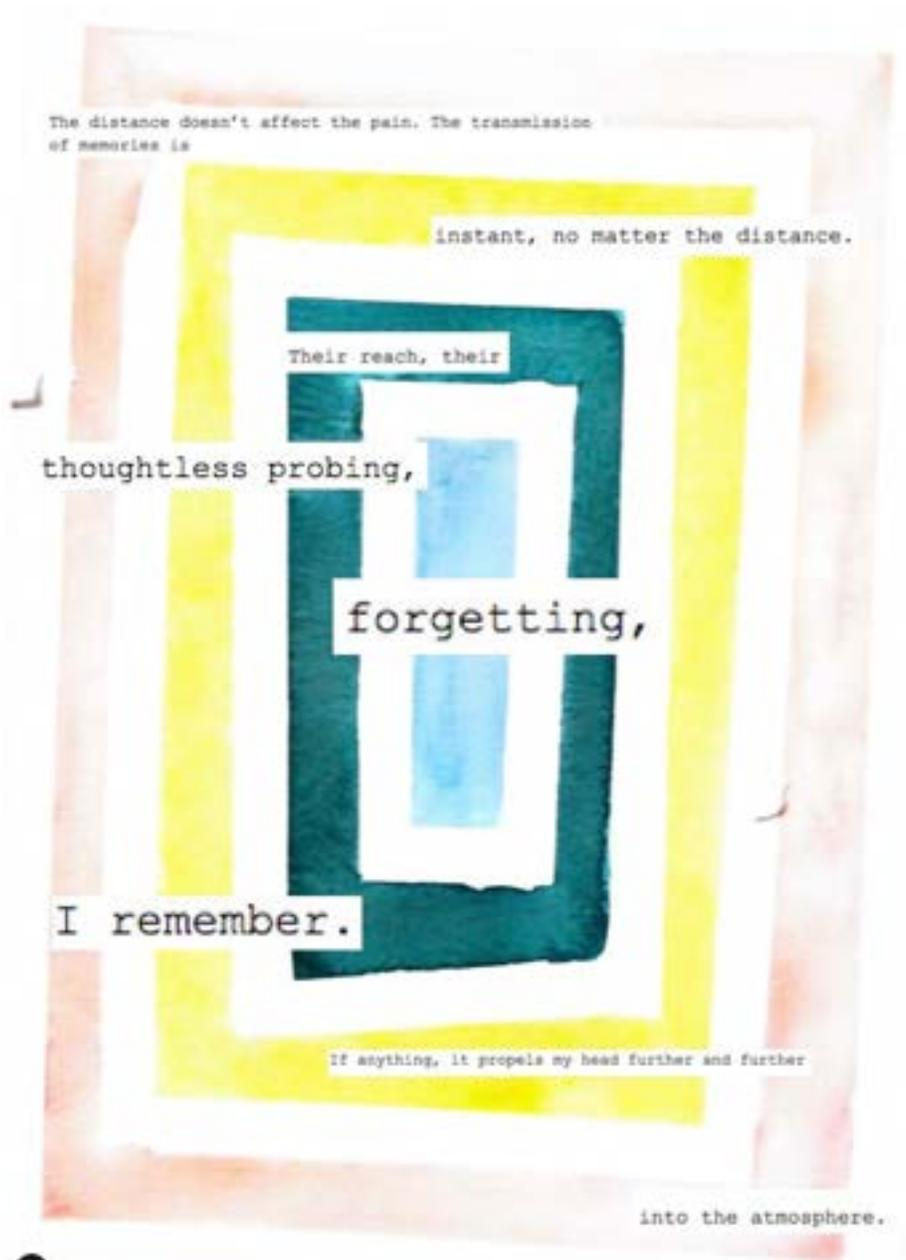
T.m. Lawson

ISSUE 6: A DAY IN THE LIFE
OF A SURVIVOR



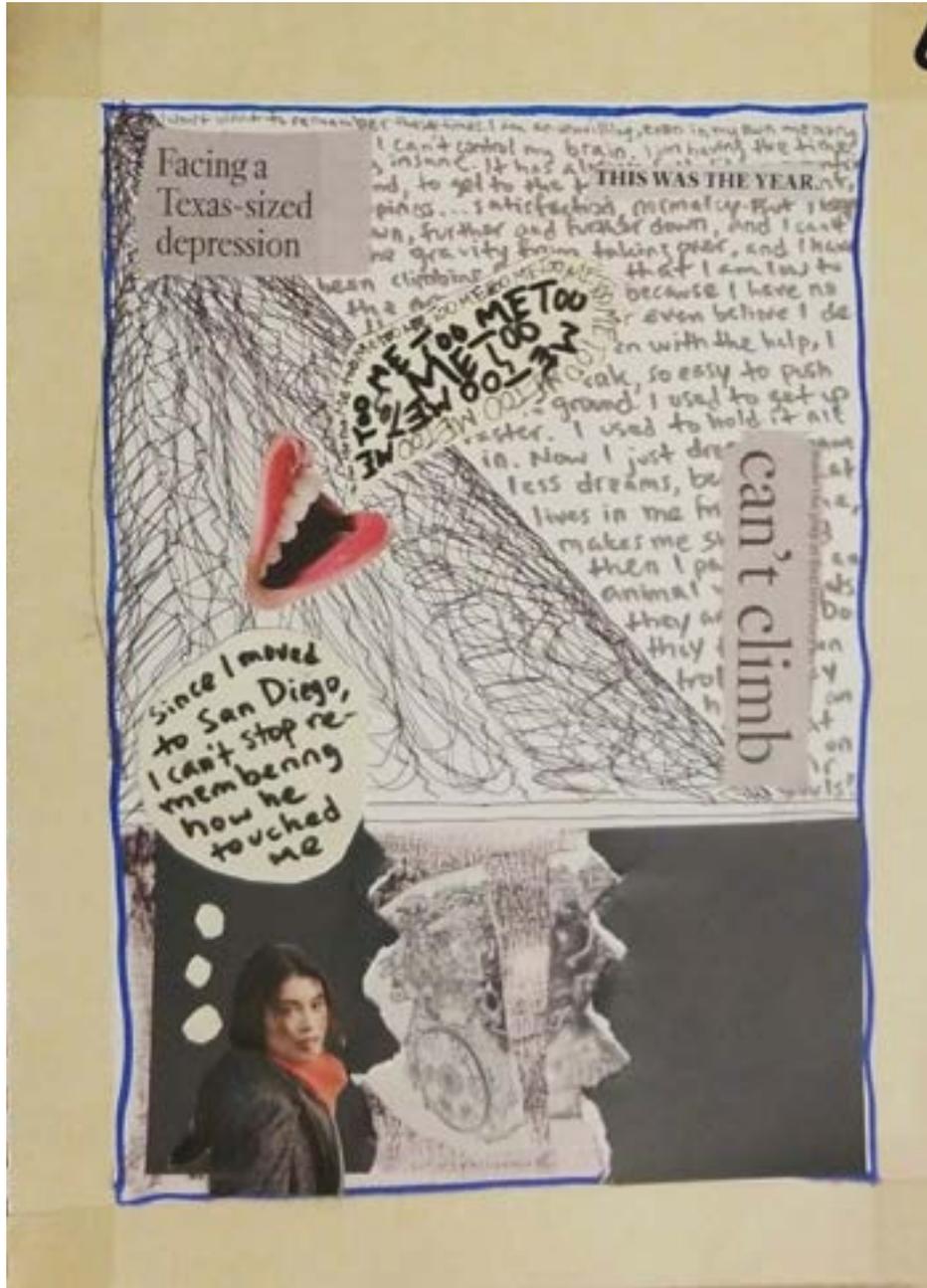






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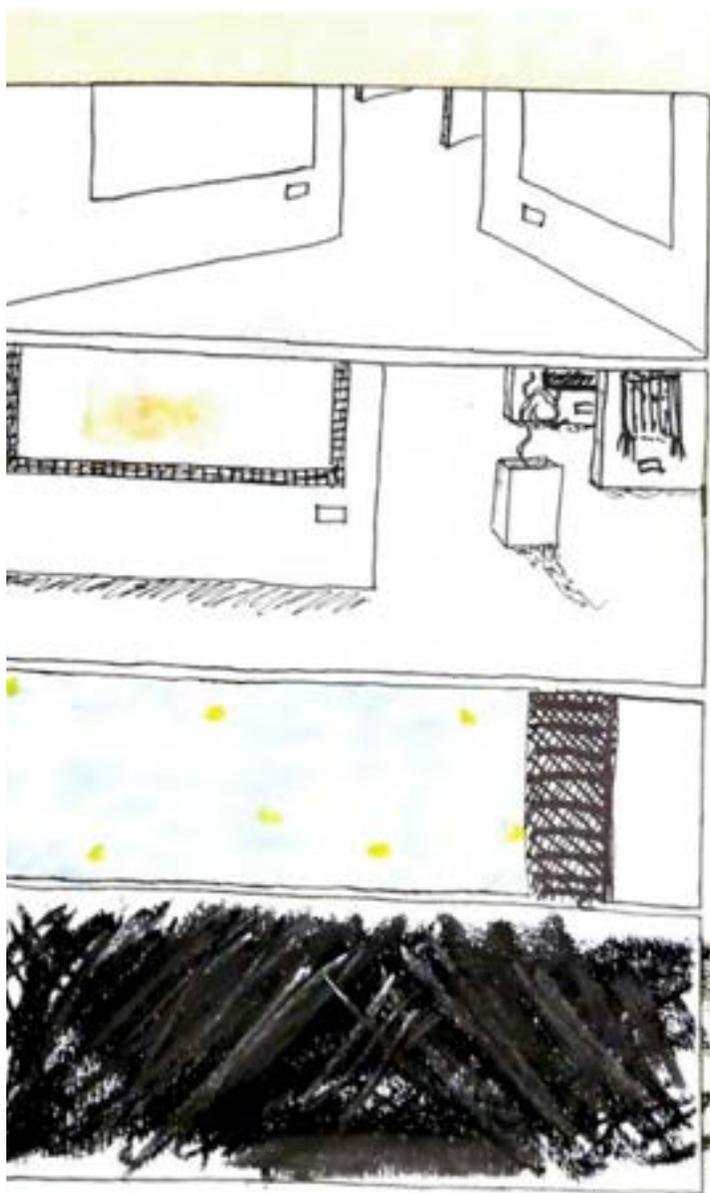








ISSUE 6: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SURVIVOR |
T.M. LAWSON



**Two
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LOOKING at?
and just take the scattered bits...
Huh, ok.

the collages were what inspired them the most?
I know, "Texas Sized" seemed pretty good
Yeah, if not for all that OBNOXIOUS 1st. Melodrama

I think the one piece that spoke to me was...
"Texas? A night?"
"S. Lone"

But this one... this one...
It feels too... over whelming.

composition of these pieces.
Eww. Primitive

Yeah, for niche information.
felt... the personal.
The artist disclosed WAY to much.

The one at the end all TORN UP?
Yeah, the screaming FACE.

I feel uncomfortable
Well, there's nothing else to look at
...without more?

Yeah, the one up to here with the "Metro" theme.
WE GET IT. YOU WERE RAPED!
Haha

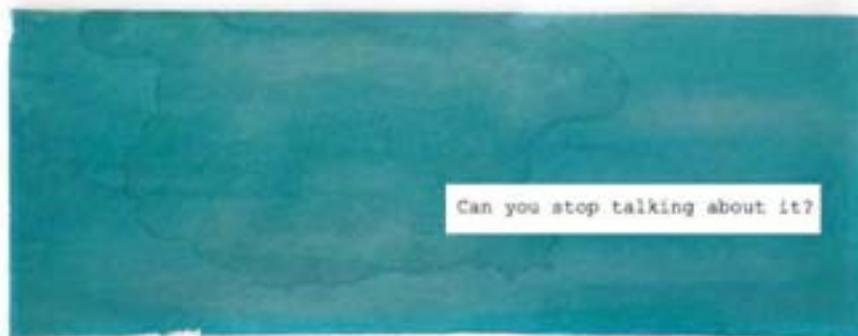
Even Picasso could show while HIDING!
No masks, No Masks, No masks.

yeah, that was pretty cool.
Probably the best ONE.





It isn't polite conversation.



Can you stop talking about it?



Can you stop

3

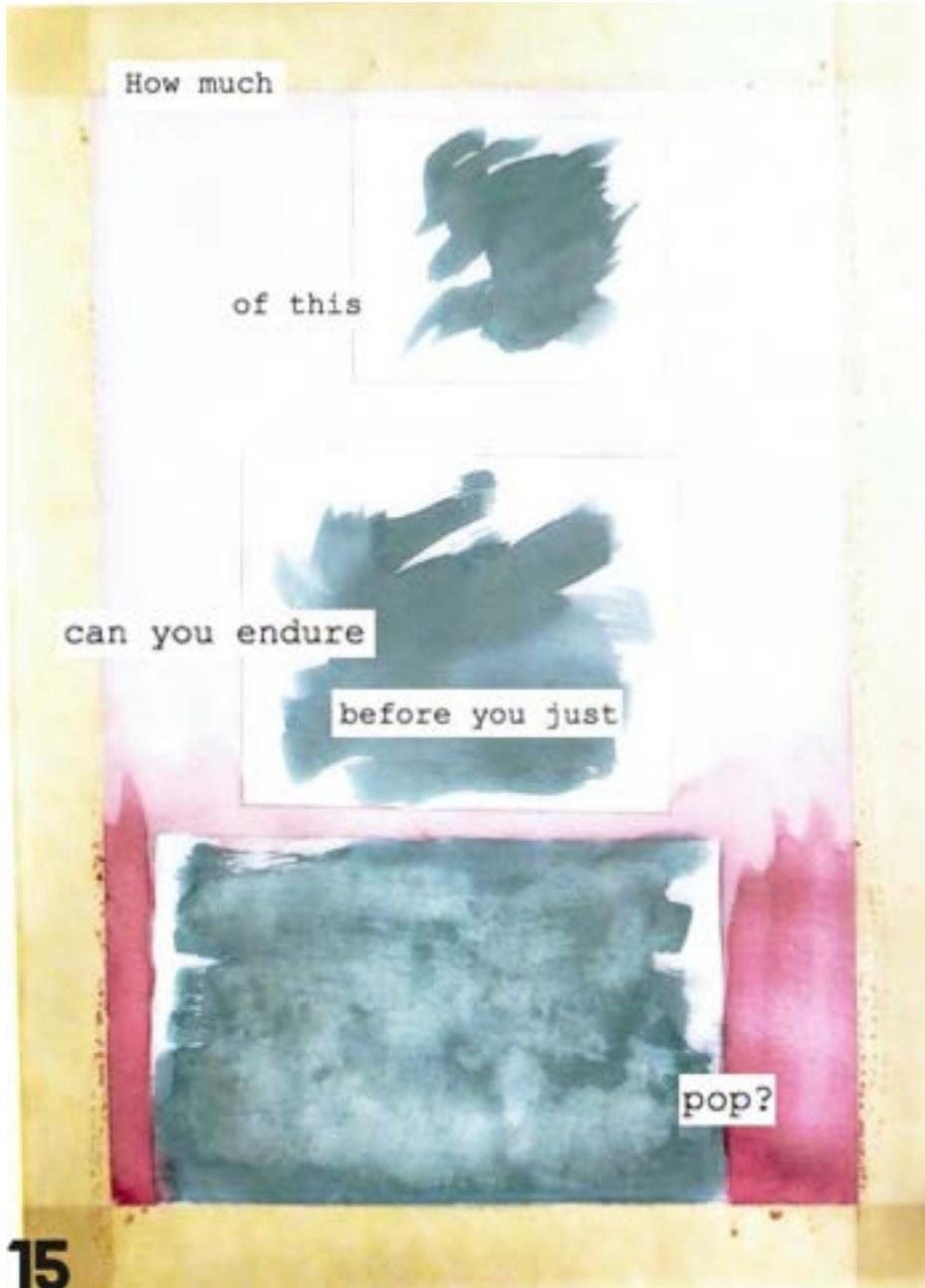




14

thinking

about it?





T.m. Lawson is a poet and a writer living in California. They are currently attending UCSD, working on their Creative Writing M.F.A. They've been published in White Stag, NILVX, Entropy, Poets.org, Other Journal, and Women's Studies Quarterly.

Where I've Been

Heather Bartlett

The Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center is quiet. It is too quiet after the sobs and the sirens and most of all the loudest sound you've ever heard – your own heartbeat. The sound of pumping blood was racing, pounding, echoing in your own ears. Before it was beating so loud it felt safe. You're still here, it kept saying. Still-here, still-here, still-here. It has subsided now and you're left all alone.

The center is too quiet and too soft. They take you to a room that is lavender top to bottom. There are stuffed animals in the corner and there are softly lit lamps. You do not want to be here. You want to be in a small white room that is clean and obvious. You want to shower. You want to sleep. The last thing you want is to be talking to a counselor in a lavender room on a lavender couch near a vase full of daisies.

At first they don't ask you what happened. The police already have. They've asked you and asked you and police officers have recycled their way around your apartment questioning Him and then checking on you. They don't seem to know any better than you do what's happening so you talk to six different men, intimidating men, big men in big navy blue uniforms. You have to tell them again and again while you're crouching in that same bed and rocking and crying and being stuck in that twenty minutes for another two hours. You're so sure that they'll help you if you tell it just right. You're scared of them but they're all that you have.

When the police take you to the center, you must be in shock. You must be. And you're definitely still drunk, or maybe already hungover, because your head is pounding and your eyes can focus but barely and walking straight takes effort. You don't want to be drunk. You don't want anyone looking at you. And you worry because you're surrounded by cops and you're drunk and you're only twenty and at any minute they could turn on you. They could turn and get you. And they're all that you have.

The nurse finally comes in after the counselor has sat with you and you know because you're not stupid that they're trying to soothe you before it begins. These women sitting here in the middle of the night means something big is happening now. And you're scared to death when you realize strangers are trying to calm you. Soothe you like a wild animal. And it terrifies you that this is actually a necessity and that you need strangers and soft words and you don't even know it. You need it even though it feels like hell.

The nurse has a clipboard and she asks you questions, and they say you can stop anytime, but you want to go-go-go because after every page that she scribbles through she turns to another one and you're barely keeping it together and your mind's so quiet like it never is. Between questions you don't think. You don't think anything or see anything in your mind or pray or listen. Your brain sits in nothing and



waits for the next line of her form.

She repeats horrible words to you. Horrible phrases, wanting to know if He touched your anus or forced you to touch His and you hate the word 'anus' and you're appalled that they are asking you about yours and His and what happened between the two. You hate words like 'anus' and 'fingering' and 'penetrate'. You've always hated those words, and now they're saying them to you over and over again and asking you what you know about a span of minutes prior to a 9-1-1 call made by your roommate. They want specifics. You don't want to be associated with those words, or hear them or speak them and it crosses your mind that He doesn't have to talk about anuses or penetration and that He doesn't have to talk at all. He's in a cell and it's sterile and obvious and you wish you could switch places and make Him do all the talking of these awful words at this 2am in this lavender room.

It feels like nothing's happening. In the minutes between the call and the cops at the door, everything happened. You began breathing again and your voice came back and you're screaming and thrashing and your roommate is scared of you and has locked you both in so that He can't

get you except there's no lock on the door so he's pushed a chair up to the knob. When you scream he says "He can't get you, you're safe" and he's angry as he says it and it's just a chair – just a chair – just a chair before the door which is the only thing that separates you from Him and He's in the living room just a few feet away. You hate your roommate for being scared and for not hugging you or holding you down or even sitting on the same side of the room. You hate him for telling you that the chair against the door will protect you. You know now you can't protect yourself. What good is a chair?

When you finally leave the lavender room, they take you to a stainless-steel exam room. It feels safer and real, even though you have to spread your legs for strangers, they're women and they're looking and the lights are on bright and you can be silent and somehow this is so much safer the lavender room. The clinical white walls and fluorescent lights are exactly what you've been waiting for.

You lie on the table for a long time and they search for DNA like it's hiding on you and could be anywhere. They search for DNA like you've been rolling in gold dust and like a fool you went



and shook it all off. Not much is left, but if in some tiny crevice, armpit, touch of the lower back, tongue, abdomen, tussle of hair – if they find one tiny speck of illusive gold powder, you will all have struck rich.

The nurse finishes her form. You dress and by the time you leave, the cop that escorted you is sound asleep in the lobby. You wish he wouldn't slump over like that because he's going to save you. You wish he'd been reading a paper in the pastel waiting room like a worried father. Like your father would have done at 2 am in an airport while he was waiting for his airplane to arrive. You don't wish your father was here, because you have decided this is a dream. None of this is really happening which is why everything feels surreal and nobody's familiar. When you wake up you won't remember their faces, this story. You won't remember these people at all because not one of them is real.

Leaving the center is like leaving a cottage. It should be a cottage with a smoking stone chimney and pebble-framed windows. It's a lavender cottage and two women are waving you goodbye like you're leaving on stop in your fairytale and they're wishing you the best.

Outside, it is night. There are no lamps or fairytale wonders and the coastal air is cold and wet. Big swoops of black air tumble in and out of your lungs, expanding and alive and it would feel wonderful, and you would stand here breathing

this air all night in and out in that reassuring beat from your ears. You would live in this breathing and you would rejoice in each breath. You would cherish this moment if you hadn't just realized you never breathe in your dreams. If you hadn't just realized this whole night did happen, everything has been real.

Heather is a graduate of US Santa Barbara's College of Creative Studies program in creative writing. Heather is currently writing a book about the five years spent working as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) in the San Francisco Bay Area. Heather now works with students at a graduate school in Berkeley where she lives with her exchange-student husband and two rambunctious rescue pups.

Girl Stuff

Mary McBeth

You are dressed and ready to go. The radio is on, as well as certain strategic lights.

As you check that all windows and doors are locked, you look through all of those panes of glass to ensure no one is lurking around your house, ready to spring out and shove their way through the front door.

Now, you set the alarm for leaving. 90 seconds.

You look out all of the windows. Again. Needing to ensure, again, that in the last couple of minutes while you set the alarm, no one came lurking, came ready to spring out and shove their way through the front door when you leave.

You double-check you have your keys ready to open the car on your way, just in case you have to make a dash for it.

Then you open your front door, just enough to poke your head through, look out, left and right. Scan the bushes.

STOP!

A man you don't know strolls past your house. *Could be a trap.*

You retreat inside, turn off the alarm sequence, and wait until he goes by before starting all over again.

When you were a little girl, your immigrant grandmother showed you and then let you obsess over the full page spread in the NY Post of unlucky victims of domestic violence, mafia hits and botched home invasions. The bashed skulls

all over the front page, the gory gory details written in third grade level English. You know all too well how horribly wrong things can go when you, a woman, let your guard down, even just for a second. You know inexplicably bad things happen to good people so...

Windows and doors are locked. *Check.* Look out all of the windows. *Check.* Confirm that no one is lurking about, ready to spring out and shove their way through the front door. *Check.*

Then set the alarm for leaving. 90 seconds. *Check.*

Again.

Windows. Look out of them. Be sure that suspicious passersby and any would-be accomplices have not come lurking in the last couple of minutes while you set the alarm, have not come ready to spring out and shove their way through the front door. *Check. Check. Check.*

Remote control car key at the ready to open the car door on your way to it just in case you have to make a dash for it—you open the front door of the house, poke your head through, look left and right, scan the bushes. *Check. Check.*

So far, so good.

Now:

You place the key into the lock and replace it in your left hand with your keychain mace before walking out, so you avoid fumbling and losing focus on your surroundings—if, say, some shysters were to show up and attempt some kind

of diversion.

Then you step out through the doorway and in one pivot you turn the key, locking it, and in another smooth motion, you pull the key out and walk to the car, scanning the yard the whole time.

You look around the car to make sure no one is crouched there.

Then you open the doors with your handy remote control key.

Your keychain mace is ready in your right hand now—just in case.

Finally, you slip into the front seat and lock all the doors so there will be no carjacking nonsense in your future. It's irrelevant that you live in a rural area. You don't want to become a statistic. You scan the area as you pull out, in case that weird ambler has returned. Really! Who walks these days! Then you drive away.

*

You arrive at the Walmart parking lot, careful not to park next to any vans or SUVs with dark tinted windows. But you need to be close enough to the front door so that surveillance cameras, and as many people as possible, will see you when you get to your trunk after shopping—to possibly be witnesses or hear you scream for help in the event you are abducted or attacked by anyone.

Who?

Anyone!

Some stalker ex, maybe. Some...one...like your stepfather? Your grandfather?

No, that was a long time ago. You are all grown up now. You know what to do. How to stay safe. You locate an ideal parking spot, 20 feet from the entrance, and look all around the car before quickly getting out, shutting and locking the door with your handy remote key as you stride briskly to the front entrance of the store, head on a swivel, clutching your purse. You make sure no man is following you.

Once you've paid for your purchases, you ask for a helpful store employee to escort you to your car—preferably a strong young man to protect you from other random men who may be trolling the parking lot. That way no one can jump you as you pack your trunk, shove you inside and take off with you stowed away in your own car. Serial predators are often shockingly practical. If there is no employee to escort you, you check the back seat for anyone hiding on the floor back there, you skip the trunk and you hurriedly toss your bags in the vacant back seat, head still on a swivel the whole time. Sometimes, you take the cart back. Sometimes, you leave it there by the back of the trunk. It depends on the time of day, how safe you feel.

If a man walks towards you, you loudly greet him before he gets within 8 feet of you. “Yes! What do you want?” you shout as you scoot towards the driver's side door. He thinks you are unhinged but he knows you are aware of him and thus a poor choice of victim. Either way, you win.



You are in the car now, doors locked, window cracked just an inch. If it's that important, he is happy to speak through the inch as you start the motor. If not, he goes away. Either way, you win.

*

Your sister binge watches *Law and Order: SVU* and sends you warning email chains of rapists' tactics and latest scams against unsuspecting women. So you know to call the cops if, say, you hear a baby crying on your front steps, for them to come see if it's a recording meant to lure you to open the door in the dead of night. To lock all your vehicle doors before you pump gas at the station. To be home before dark.

*

And you are home before dark. As always. Because you know "freaks come out at night" is not just a song.

Now you do all of the motions in reverse. Once inside, you turn on your alarm system. It tells you that all the doors and windows are still closed, undisturbed in your absence.

You do not close the curtains—not right away. Instead, you go through each room, turning on lights, just in case. You want to be sure no one is hiding in a closet. You wouldn't want to have the curtains closed when you need your neighbors to see you flailing for help.

Now you go around again, close the curtains.

You relax, watch some crime shows and contemplate getting a dog. Or a gun. Or a

boyfriend?

Tomorrow you will visit the dog shelter.

Mary is an African-American writer, editor, and survivor, and the editor-in-chief of Memoir Magazine (www.memoirmag.com), home of the 2018 #MeToo Trigger Warning Essay Contest. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous places, including: *82 Review, Argot Magazine, The Nervous Breakdown, Cobalt Review, Awakened Voices, and others. To date, she has lived in more than 220 cities, in 23 countries. She spent 12 years in Italy working as a fashion model, the subject of her memoir-in-process entitled, 'Perfect.' Find her at www.MaryMcBeth.com

When They Come Calling

I. Grey

I don't remember the weather or what I had for breakfast, but I remember my outfit: a pastel sweater of green, pink, and yellow with pink leggings to match. I preferred life in the background, but I felt pretty in that ensemble; not the kind of pretty other people notice, but the kind that makes you smile to yourself. That afternoon, one of the boys in my class commented on my lack of figure in front of the others. My body had never before been a point of public interest. Until that day, I was secure in my invisibility, and it was ripped from my grasp with one effortless remark. After that, my pastel outfit was stuffed into the bottom of a dresser and I never wore it again. That was how it started.

There is no normal. None of us really fit the label; we all have quirks and histories, and we all do our best to move forward either because of or in spite of them. As a young girl, I had few friends, good grades, and a quiet demeanor. After being harassed, touched, ridiculed, leered at, prodded, grabbed, felt, handled, trapped, stroked, cornered, patted, fondled, and completely disregarded, an unfamiliar feeling began to spread inside me like a virus. It was hate. I wish I could say I hated those boys for what they took from me, but it would be years before that would happen. I hated myself: for not knowing better, for getting caught, for not instilling in them the fear they lodged in me. It wouldn't be until college that I'd be able to acknowledge the

person I had become. I think that's when, in some subconscious attempt at survival, my hate turned on my oppressors and all those like them.

But time didn't spring forward, it dragged itself alongside me. Soon, my favorite outfit was just the washed out memory of a girl I used to know and by then, I had trained my body to protect. My height was a sort of cape that kept my fragility covered from the crowd; my thick, full hair was a shield that kept unknown danger away; my eyes, piercing and cold, became my sword. It wasn't long before I developed a method for managing my feelings. I decided I could reveal as little or as much as I wanted using only my body. With this kind of physical communication, I rarely used words. When my friends began calling me a robot, I took it as an expression of their adoration and respect. I thought that by having control over my reactions, I could navigate the world without feeling its weight. Unknowing of the cost of lies at an age when self-preservation was more important than truth, I began to disappear.

In high school, I thought if I could remain under the influence, I could stay ahead of the curve. Believing that I was meant for a single purpose, I never waited for anyone to take it; I was proactive. I put myself in dangerous situations, one after the other, until I eventually did to myself what they had done. That was my normal. And then it wasn't. Almost all at once





everything was new. I could taste my memories. I could hear my body screaming. At that point, I understood why I had to face the magnitude of it all—the eyes, the hands, the fingers, other parts. I fell, for some time, into the deepest fragments of myself; those parts filled with murky water and sunken hope. But it was better to hurt out loud than to pretend in my own quiet.

A typical day begins like a flood. Everything that's been done to me, everything I've done returns and I start again. Some mornings I practice yoga to remind myself of how much there is; other mornings I lug myself to work without really looking in the mirror. I'm searching for balance and self-love and the naïve notion that people can still be good. On days when my hate is soft, I feel like I might be ready to live the kind of life my six-year-old self would have welcomed. And for the most part, I don't fade into the background. Instead, I laugh too hard, sing too loud, and wear all the pastel I can find.

Short Stories

Raina Greifer

My life became pure fiction
A statistic of
Whether I can show my legs
I have to remind myself it wasn't my legs
That were touched
My chest is covered in fingerprints instead
Turtlenecks can be warm
And in heat I am safe
Sometimes under running water
I'm scared to touch my own body
I no longer have the right to call it
My own
What does that even mean
I own nothing
But the empty air
And a few too many ghosts
If you're growing quiet right now
It's okay, I am too
I regret saying nothing
I regret saying anything
Is there an in between of screaming and silence
I long for that





Raina Greifer began exploring writing as a form of therapeutic release while dealing with anxiety and depression. She uses poetry and playwriting to explore her own personal traumas, relationships, and identity. Most of her writing focuses on mental health, heartbreak, and sexual assault, using sporadic word choice and writing through a stream of consciousness form. Her ultimate goal is to develop a personal connection to the reader and expose her own vulnerabilities for the sake of allowing others to feel less alone. She self publishes her writing and visual art on sleepwalkersartcollective.org, an art collective she founded with the purpose of giving young artists exposure, and has also had pieces published on vocal.media



I heard heaven but they didn't hear me

C.Z. Heyward

2 July, 0125

Young vivacious voices sang in the next room
A church choir rejoiced on TV
Their singing echoed in my head as if it were hollow
But I laid there
Frozen

He was done with me
Shredded my loins

Beaten
tethered in this web bloodied and swollen
Face down
Jeans pulled to my waist on his kitchen table

The hungry pants and gasps for air were
No longer mine
No longer his

It was that damn pudgy-faced nasty slobbering mastiff of his,
Quasimodo

He'd witnessed it all
And he looked like he had seen it before
Yet he cocked his head as if searching for
the answer to some interstellar riddle

He was still drinking that gin
As he zipped up his pants
He raised his glass as if toasting to my health
Walked around the table
Surveying my whimpering carcass



He stepped aside to let me go
He would not impede me
Be steady
But be swift
I can't let him do this to me again

Again?
Did it happen at all?
He was bigger than me
Stronger
I did fight, right?
No it didn't happen

Then why was I bleeding

“Then he will say to those on his left,
‘Depart from me, you cursed,
into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
Matthew 25:41

Television still on as I crossed his yard

31 July, 0830

“You want to report what?” my commander demanded of me

“You're talking about your squadron leader.”

“Decorated five times in three tours in the sand.”

“A husband and father of three.”

‘Yes sir’ stumbled over my lips each time



“I’m not gonna sugarcoat this for you,
because you know his story will vary.
What this will do to him, and do
to you will be a quite scary.”

“Yes sir”

This pangolin faced troll’s only concern was
the clerical nightmare it would bring
He wanted to dismiss it as some petty matter
That I needed to reform my way of thinking
Hoping this fad would pass like I was some teenaged girl

21 August, 1435

At my court martial
I could still hear that chorus singing
A brutal homicidal act was what the judge had said
Then my life sentence was summarily read

As the two MPs started to lead me away
My commander only had one thing to say,

“Robert, did you have to shoot the dog too?”

“Yes sir.”

C. Z. Heyward is an emerging poet, playwright, and social critic whose work has appeared in a number of journals including: The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide, Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine, and The Sacred Cow. His work has found platforms in the United Kingdom, France and Greece. When he’s not writing, he enjoys live jazz in dark bars and riding his vintage motorcycles. He is also pursuing his PhD in educational leadership at St. John’s University (New York).

Input: PTSD/Output: Hypervigilance

Jessica Nirvana Ram

Input: wavelength of his vocal chords, cadence of his speech (sober and intoxicated), the octave of his voice that echoes in empty spaces

Output: stomach in free-fall, no parachute, no landing pad, heartbeat running a marathon with no finish line, eyes wide like pools of damp earth unable to withstand another storm

Input: outline of his silhouette (note the slanted posture), half-cocked smiles, raised eyebrows, red sweatshirts, his hands

Output: body folding into paper crane, folding into pocket, crumpling into forgotten page, skin like chameleon but only for shadows and cracks in the sidewalk

Input: scent of smoked cigarettes (hand rolled) on his fingers, trace of tequila and lime tumbling from his lips, breath heavy and hot and sudden, smell of sweat

Output: systems on overload, systems shutting down

Input: tongue and teeth and fingernails, the silence of the hallway after the door clicked shut, tongue and teeth and fingernails



Output: glass puncturing
lungs, gears grinding
in gut, bones turning
to dust and rubble

Input: the guilt in his eyes

Output: systems failing,
systems failing,
systems failing

Jessica Nirvana Ram recently graduated with a BA in Creative Writing from Susquehanna University in May 2018. Jessica has written poetry since learning the malleability of words. Poetry is what has helped Jessica process the assault experienced last May. Jessica works a lot in the form of performance poetry to try to have the work live with versatility both on page and stage. Recent publications include a poem in this year's issue of Catfish Creek, a national undergraduate literary magazine; and a poem in RiverCraft, an on-campus literary magazine.

What I Was Trying to Say Was Don't Stick Your Hand Down My Dress

Gabriela Gonzales

when i wore that dress to his birthday party, what i was trying to say was don't stick your hand down my dress. that's what i try to say with everything i wear, but sometimes more than others.

like when i go to a party by myself. like when i get drunk. like when i get drunk at a party i came to by myself.

like when my drink is spiked. like when i call my friends because i can't hold myself up in the bathroom. like when no one answers. like when i know i'll get picked up at ten o'clock but it's nine and i'm scared.

like when i don't understand sexual harassment enough to see it coming.

like when i forget a girl can be sexually harassed by a girl.

like when she breathes against my neck. like when she pulls me against herself and tries to blow her cigar smoke in my mouth. like when i push her away and she grabs me again. like when her hugs last too long. like when she won't stop putting her hands on me. like when i move outside and she still won't stop putting her hands on me.

like when it's ten o'clock and my friends are running late. like when i keep texting people 'i didn't expect to get this drunk.' like when my friends show up and she tells them i can't leave. like when she pulls on my arm like i am a rag doll. like when they both pull on my arms like i am a

rope in a tug-of-war. like when she follows me inside when i go to get my things. like when she screams that my 'bra is so sexy' to everyone in the house. like when she tells everyone in the house to come look at my bra. like when she sticks her hand down my dress to pull at my bra.

like when she sticks her hand down my dress like when she sticks her hand down my dress like when she sticks her hand down my dress

i am not saying stop because i never said go. i am not saying no because i thought i was saying no by wearing skin, having eyes, by being called a human, by not saying yes, by not taking her hand and putting it down my dress, by not asking for it with my mouth. dresses cannot ask for it. i did not ask for it. i did not ask for it.

it is months before i wear the dress again. i look in the mirror and my stomach hurts. the dress is my favorite shade of blue. it is high necked and goes down to just above my knees. there's a cut out in the back.

once i sat in the back seat of a car with a boy and he told me i looked pretty in that dress. he didn't try to stick his hand down it.

i think, what am i trying to say with this dress? i think, maybe i'm saying the wrong thing with this dress. i think, how is this dress talking without me? i think, this dress cannot talk without me. i think, this dress cannot say anything that i do not say with my mouth.

i think, what i am trying to say is don't stick
your hand down my dress.

Gabriela Gonzales a Creative Writing major at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee who is in love with the written word and the way it can take people away from the real world. Gabriela's poetry and flash fiction have previously received recognition in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and won first place for fiction in the Sandra Hutchins' Humanities Symposium Writing Awards two years in a row, had a poem featured in a publication of the Live Poet's Society of NJ, was recognized as one of the top ten youth playwrights in Denver, Colorado, and had a flash fiction piece published in the Belmont Literary Journal. Gabriela really appreciate giraffes, the oxford comma, and babies dressed like hipsters.





Consent Violation I & II

Julian Mithra

Consent Violation I

no
no no oh no no no no no no no no no
no no no no no no no no no no no no
no no no no why not no no no no no
no no no no no no no no no no no no
no no no no no no no no no no sure
no
no no no no hmm no no no no no no
what no
no no no no no no no no no no no no
no come on no no no no no no no no
no no no no no no ha no no no no
no no no no no no um no no no no no
no no no no no no no no no no no no
no no no no no hey no no no no no no
no no no no no no no no no no no no
no no meh no no no no no no no no no
no no no no no no no no no no later
no
no no no no no no no no right no no
no no no no no no no no no no no no
no no no no no no no no no no no no
no no no no no no no no no no no no
no no no no no well no no no no no no



Consent Violation II

yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
 yes yes yes but yes yes yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes oh yes yes yes
 yes well yes yes ew yes yes yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes yes yes sure yes
 yes hey yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
 yes yes yes wait yes yes yes yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes yes yes only yes
 yes um yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes yes my yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
 please yes yes yes yes yes uh yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
 ouch yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes yes dude yes yes
 yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
 yes yes what yes yes yes yes yes yes
 yes yes really yes yes yes yes yes yes

Julian née Sara Mithra hovers between genre and gender, border mongering and mongreling. At local festivals, they exhibit handmade chapbooks and cut-up zines. Read their words on paper in Versal 12, Milvia Street, Storm Cellar, ANXY, Written on the Body, and The Other Side of Violet and on a screen at pnkprl, Gendertrash Café, and PoetryFilmKanal. They received the Prospero Prize from Fathom Books in 2017. Find unsettling recitations on Soundcloud and watch soft-focus, collage poem videos on Vimeo. Their first chapbook, *If the Color is Fugitive*, is due out from Nomadic Press this fall.

Doomed From Conception

Patricia Richardson

I was Doomed from the day of conception
 Poisoned while still in the womb

Lost my cherry to daddy at 4
 He'd creep in my room every night
 My brother took my body to explore
 Pushed face to the wall pulling out strands of my hair my cousin would use the back door
 Put my hand on his cock said my uncle jerk it harder more
 My father's best friend oh he was a gem with his hand on my throat and filling my vagina just to
 remove them with his tongue
 The kid I sat for. Mother's boyfriend
 Tried to gut me to fuck me from within.
 From every direction they came
 Every orifice and more they would entertain and abuse
 I did learn young. About reprieves
 when I said I need to pee
 My bathroom now my sanctuary
 Get over it? Forget? Move on?
 My body they did take
 But
 My strength. My soul.
 I would not let go. Never let them see me cry.
 Insomnia. Distrust. insecurities. Low worth. Short temper. Always waiting for the other shoe to
 drop. My list is long.
 Sex, sounds, smells, a phrase, a look, flashbacks yes for all.
 I fight every day to live my life.
 To breath. To ignore my fear.
 To push forward. To not lash out.
 To not give in.
 Clock watching is it time to go home
 Where I can breathe.
 Suicide was never an option.
 I am strong. I've done nothing wrong
 I stand on my own two feet.



I have won.
Me you could never defeat.

Patricia Richardson's story bio:

For 14 years I was tortured and abused
An incest survivor. Rape survivor I am.
SURVIVOR not taken lightly.
I never let them see me cry
I never gave in. I fought and showed defiance.
I believe that's what made me strong.
A single mother with 2 grounded happy successful
children
Now a retired 57-year-old
Who owned my own successful interior design
company.
My writing helps me breathe.heal.stay strong.
Thank you
For reading my story poem

I Will.*Sarah Lawrence*

I will show you fear in hands latex gloves and
 the smell of disinfectant tear-away tissue
 paper on a cot the gown doesn't close

I will show you anger in hands full
 I fell asleep on a blanket in the backyard
 waking to a cricket walking across my knee
 it died between my palms

I will show you despair in handprints
 weighty and red "This is
 allowed"
 "You can trust me"

I will show you love in my father's hands
 his wedding ring is scratched
 his skin is dry his fingers run through my hair
 on the good days

I will show you shivers from cold hands the stethoscope
 on my back, you, everywhere else tell me to
 breathe I think I've forgotten how

I will show you my hands there is nothing graceful in
 this skin birthmark on my thumb and peeling
 nail polish open, close, stretch, cold, sweaty,
 dry

I will give you back your hands because I don't
 want to carry them anymore
 in dark, private places where they tore me open and burned red
 lines into my skin

Sarah Lawrence is an English student at the University of Michigan and recently completed a first collection of short stories. Sarah has a background in drama, having completed the scripts for three full-length plays. In 2013, Lawrence's play, "Flowers for a Ghost" was produced in Stockholm, Sweden. In 2016, Lawrence's play, "Strangers" was performed as part of a reading series at the University of Michigan.



**That which is tragic in time is meaningless in
eternity: An internal PTSD dialogue**

Cathryn Glenday

Images downloading like new software
 From the net,
 Cocks, fists, belts, needles, screams, flames, noise!
 Real and not real,
 Happening and not.
 NO, NO, NO, NOT AGAIN!
 Can't talk, can't tell, be quiet, disappear.
 No one must know!
 Keep going no matter the cost.
 Look good, stand straight, smile, make eye contact.
 Better for now, it has passed.
 Not again, happening once more!
 How to endure when going on is too much
 Collapse in tears, this must end,
 But no end in sight but mine.
 The turmoil is constant, now, then, always.
 Could not contain, endure or even breath another instant.
 No one can know, then said too much,
 Wrong thing to the wrong person,
 Police knocking at the door.
 Guns, cuffs, no way out but to surrender and
 Fall into terror once more.
 With more needles, lights, unwanted touch and
 Never ending sound like,
 Mother's songs and piano at 5:30 am each dawn.
 Beautiful yet smothering when more sleep desired.
 Wanting only to be left in peace from them, me, the past.
 Hating the people who say they will help when no help
 Or release ever comes but from within.
 Like constant abrasion from coarse sand paper,
 Wearing down,
 Scraping away layers of who once was,
 A child, a girl, smart, funny, dancing in joy,
 Only to be crushed like dad's endless cigarettes.
 A flame once bright, now snuffed out.

Cathryn Glenday lives in a rose-pink pueblo style house in Albuquerque, NM with Oz, The Dog and two almost-cats, Diana and Zeus. She has lived most of her life in the Southwest US. When she graduated from UCSD she was encouraged to get an MFA in poetry and creative writing before proceeding to medical school but did not think her writing was good enough. Surgical complications, that eventually resulted in amputation of her leg, prevented her from finishing medical school. Cathryn went on to get an MPH degree from UTSPH in Houston and an MA in Clinical Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies, in San Francisco. Today she is a psychotherapist that works with abused children and people with disabilities, a disability advocate and a far more confident writer. She has been writing poetry since 5th grade and is now working on a memoir addressing a period of her life when she was detoxing from opioids for chronic pain while also being sexually assaulted in a care setting. A second memoir is planned on Mother Daughter incest seen from the lens of a trained clinician. She planning to follow with books on each topic with stories from other people who have lived similar experiences. She has published poems in a variety of journals and is a contributor to *The Mighty*. In her rare free time, Cathryn enjoys live music, theater and dancing to whatever music is playing. The title of this poem is drawn from a line from *A Course in Miracles*. Cathryn has been a student of ACIM since the 80s and it brings her peace and strength.



Distractions

Trish Rodriguez

A.

One Friday after school, my mother entered my bedroom. She had a look on her face like when she had to tell me that my pet hamster died. I was twelve years old and impatiently waiting for puberty to knock on my door. She sat down on my bed and took my hand. “We have to talk about your boobs, Diane. They’re adjustable.”

If she had approached me to have another sex talk, I would have vomited up my lunch. When we had the sex talk, Mom walked into my room and told me all the anatomical names. She also used the word penetration a lot. Despite her bluntness, the only way I could tell she was nervous was because she did that rapid eye blink thing.

“My boobs?” Part of me feared that she was joking, but my mother didn’t have much of a sense of humor. She didn’t dress up her language or introduce unrelated nonsequiturs like I would have. If I had to tell my daughter about her adjustable boob power, I would have used dolls and props and possibly an analogy about a rare bird. But Mom, she just came right out and said it —I could change the size of my breasts.

“Yes. You will be able to change the size of your breasts over the next thirty years of your life.”

One of my classmates in the seventh grade, Loreen, was the first girl in class to sprout breasts. All the other girls were jealous, though none of us understood why. Loreen said that

“larger breasts look best in dresses.” All I knew was that I didn’t want to be called “so flat that my chest could be a cutting board” or “One Dimensional Diane.”

I had been looking forward to being a woman. Those women who had big boobs, tiny waists and slim, delicate wrists always looked like the epitome of femininity to me. They always seemed to have tiny feet. I felt awkward and clunky with my long flipper-like feet and no waist.

Once, while we watched a movie, my parents commented on how beautiful one of the actresses was. I sat on the floor reading while my parents cuddled on the sofa.

“She is gorgeous. Her skin looks so smooth,” my mom said. She poked my dad in the side.

“Yeah, I didn’t notice her skin. Her boobs are amazing,” my dad said.

“Phil!” My mom swatted my dad’s arm and laughed. I went back to reading, but stayed on the same page for the rest of the movie.

I had so many questions about my adjustable boobs.

“How? When? How big can I get them? Are they going to sag if I go too big?” I asked.

“This ability is hereditary. Very few other women have it. There is a button that I have to show you how to use. But beware. If you use the button too much, it will break and you will be stuck at whatever size you’re at,” my mother said.



Learning about adjustable boobs was a conversation for which I would have preferred a book, or the internet, over my mother's lecture. I was nervous to research "adjustable boobs" on my computer. Didn't they track those searches? Would I be identified as a boob-adjuster and targeted by some pervert?

My arms wrapped around my presently nonexistent chest as I rocked back and forth. No more training bras or those awkward, preteen, multicolored, overly padded holsters.

The rest of my mother's instructions barely registered. Mom said something about keeping a variety of bra sizes in my drawer and to always make sure I had the right support. She showed me where on my body the button was and how to control it. The button was in a hard to reach spot that required some contortions to adjust. I didn't care. I would become more flexible.

"There is another thing that you should know," my mother said, "you can try different sizes, but you have to choose by the time you are 40, or the choice will be made for you. The button stops working."

Forty seemed such a long way off. I had plenty of time to find the right size for me. I would try all the different sizes I could. I wouldn't worry about boys or their attention. I just wanted to look older. I wanted strangers to stop talking to me like I was a kid lost in the playground looking for

her mother.

After my mother left my room, I jumped on my bed and stuck out my chest pretending I was busty like that actress in the movie with the robot and that guy from the boy band. I spent the rest of the afternoon learning how to use the button and playing around with different sizes in front of the mirror. Mom called in every few minutes to make sure I didn't need help.

I dragged my best friend, Vera, to the mall the next day, letting her in on my secret. We spent that entire Saturday trying to find the perfect bras for me. I wanted them to be lacy, floral, delicate, and make me look curvy. D cups were desirable, but none of the size D bras were lacy. They were industrial looking and either black, beige, or white. I didn't care. I wanted to be a D cup. The sales lady offered to help and I politely told her that I was fine. My first bra was labeled "nude" though it was several shades lighter than my skin tone. The band was too loose for my small frame, but I didn't know any better. I just knew that I had a size D bra, and (in my twelve-year old mind) this meant I was a woman. I wanted to be accepted as a woman and a woman had an ample bosom.

When I walked through the dressing room's heavy maroon curtains, Vera giggled and held her hand over her mouth. She pointed to my blouse buttons that popped open in the middle. No

matter how much I slouched or sucked in, I burst out of that blouse. Vera begged me to try a different size, but asking for help meant accepting an endless childhood. I bought the bra anyway. I bought a pullover.

That Monday, I dressed for school in my new bra and my new pullover. In the kitchen, my mother fed my baby sister, and my father read the news while hunched over the breakfast counter sipping his coffee. He looked up and dribbled his coffee a little.

“Did you tell her?” my father asked in a poor attempt at whispering.

“We talked about the button, so no need for you to say anything.” My mother didn’t look up from my sister’s oatmeal-smearred face. She didn’t even look at what I wore. She must have signaled my father to be quiet. I grabbed a boiled egg and ran for the school bus.

The second I started running for the bus my new boobs hurt and my back hurt and my shoulders hurt. I could have adjusted at school in the girls’ bathroom, but my pride kept me from acknowledging those Ds were too oversized for my body and that the bra didn’t fit.

The boys in school stared at my chest. Mouths dropped. Necks craned. Eyes bulged. Before class even started, I eyed the nurse’s office to hide out.

In advisory, everyone kept passing notes and giggling. My advisor, Mr. Abbott sent me to the

principal with a note. That note read, “Please talk to Diane.” The principal called the nurse to join us.

The principal sat behind his desk. The nurse leaned against the window, tapping her foot. “I understand at this age you might be encouraged to alter your size with tissue or socks or whatever, but your size is a little...how do we say...um.”

I was embarrassed by all the attention, but I didn’t understand what I had done wrong. I wanted to climb on top of that messy desk and scream out, “I have a button that gives me adjustable boobs!” How dare they think these are socks. This is Grade A, pure me—with the help of a button.

“Such a large chest area can be distracting in a school environment, dear,” the principal stammered while looking at the nurse.

“Distracting?” I asked. How distracting is it for me to be teased for not having boobs?

The principal chewed on a pen.

“The boys and the male teachers might find it distracting, dear,” the nurse said.

My cheeks flushed, and my hands shook a little. I wiped the sweat off my palms on the side of my pants. I thought about storming out of the school and never returning. I just wanted to look less gangly and awkward. I wanted to be dainty and curvy.

They gave me the option of either having my mother pick me up, or “emptying my stuffing in the ladies’ room.” I couldn’t bear to tell them that I was one of the rare girls who had a button. I called my mother. The rest of the year I kept my boobs at As and my face sullen. Instead of One Dimensional Diane, kids would ask me, “Do you have a tissue?” I wanted to slap everyone.

B.

When I reached high school, some kids still joked about the day I showed up in school with my bra stuffed. I chose to adjust to Bs. Most of the other girls seemed to be about that same size. With Bs, my tops didn’t stretch or gap at the bust line. My Bs seemed to not be distracting. The bras weren’t too expensive or look grandmotherly like the Ds. My body still felt gangly and awkward.

The girls with larger boobs were harassed constantly. Boys would mimic them walking around by sticking their chests out. Girls would call them fat, or worse, slutty.

Junior year, my crush since freshman year, Bobby, invited me to the prom. Bobby was a lacrosse player with strong legs, long curly hair, and a broad smile. To buy my gown, my mother and I drove to Jane’s Prom and Bridal. I couldn’t bring myself to ask my seamstress mother to sew me a dress, and she didn’t offer.

While I didn’t want to look like a model, I wanted to fit in with what everyone else wore.

Those days everyone wore strapless, so I chose several dresses that I had seen in magazines.

“How’s it looking in there, Diane?” my mom called in through the curtain. I adjusted my button to Ds in the dressing room and tried on a platinum grey, strapless, silk gown with satiny buttons down the back. My cleavage looked amazing. I glided out of the dressing room feeling comfortable in my body. I twirled and shook my hair like I was a model on a runway. I posed at all angles. My dress slid down a little, but I could fix that with the right bra and some double stick tape. In my mind I was nominated for an Academy Award, and every designer wrangled to style me. I remembered seventh grade Loreen’s comment about big boobs looking great in dresses.

My mother took one look at me and sighed. Her eye twitched. “You look beautiful, but I’m worried,” my mom said.

“Worried?”

“People might get the wrong message.”

“Because it’s strapless?” I asked.

My mother never stopped being blunt and direct. When she had to tell me about using deodorant, she took me to the aisle and said, “Choose one.” When I pulled my unruly hair into a messy pony tail, she gave me lessons on natural hair care, and the LOC method, (apply in leave-in conditioner, oil, then styling cream.) When I

failed algebra because I wasn't doing the homework, she told me to work harder. When I told her that I wanted to be an actress, she told me the statistics that less than ten percent make it, but she would stand behind me if I wanted to try.

But as I stood in that dressing room, my mom paused before she spoke. "No, honey. I mean with all that cleavage. People might think that you're easy." My mom stammered and wouldn't make eye contact. She sighed and kept lightly trying to pull the top of the dress up. My mother, the woman who stared down angry bridezillas every day, who would have taken on a bull to protect her children, couldn't look me in the eye.

"What people?" I asked. I remembered my middle school principal and his messy desk. I remembered the nurse calling me dear. I remembered all the snickering in school. Was I choosing my breast size to avoid the teasing or to look like everyone else? All those actresses and models, when they wore dresses with cleavage showing, did people think they were easy? How much cleavage makes one look easy? What about all the women with Ds that didn't come from a button? Were they forced to forever wear turtlenecks? Of course I didn't ask my mother any of these questions. I chose a dress with long sleeves and a high neckline and adjusted my boobs to Bs.

C.

When I was a freshman in college, I felt less gangly and my breast size was more a matter of convenience. I chose As for exercising and Cs for walking around. With my mother's voice in my head, I was still afraid to try Ds again.

One night after some late night studying, a guy walked me home. Several times before, we had met to study for a chemistry class. We didn't really study, more like talked about the class, Bob Marley, and Young and the Restless. We chatted so easily. He would listen without interrupting me. I always felt like the only person in the world. He would maintain eye contact in a way that I had never seen before—a gaze so intense I would have to look away. When we parted he would brush my cheek with a soft kiss and held my elbow for a second after.

"Here we are, Adams Hall," I said. My dorm, stuck in ancient times, was all girls. The groundskeepers pulled the ivy off the sides so boys wouldn't climb the walls and sneak in through the windows. The building was surrounded by a ditch that everyone called The Moat.

"Let me see your room. You told me it was awesome," he said. I had never invited him to my room. My father's voice, admonishing me about having a boy in my room, kept repeating in my head. Dad's voice would deepen whenever he

was giving me safety advice. I checked the boy into my dorm. The normally bustling hallways were empty. I opened my door, which I always kept unlocked. My neighbors would help themselves to my fridge and watch television in my room. My walls had string lights and posters of Klimt's "The Kiss" and Audrey Hepburn as Holly Golightly. I poured us each a glass of orange juice and sat on the bed. The pulp stuck in my throat. I wished it had been beer or wine. He remained standing, leaning against the wall that jutted into the room.

I talked about a soap opera plot line, and he just stood there. He broke eye contact, and I stopped talking.

"Your breasts are amazing," he said. As he turned back to me, I was in the room with a stranger. His eyes shadowed and his shoulders squared. The smell of his cologne, like citrus wrapped in leather, filled my nose.

"Well, it is getting late," I said.

He lunged at me with the strength of a silverback gorilla, attacking me in a frenzy. Hands wrapped around my neck and squeezed. There was no screaming "No," only "Please, stop." I begged for my life. My ears clogged as if I had a cold.

He released my neck and ripped my blouse off and pulled down my pants in one swift moment as I choked and coughed, hoping to breathe. I was

crushed by his weight on top of me, smothered as he penetrated me. My mind left my body.

My eyes locked on my Klimt poster. The man is clutching the woman in an embrace. I used to think it was romantic, that she is swept away by his touch. But on that day, she pushed him away, turning her head. He was faceless and formless, enveloping her.

He forced me over onto my stomach, shoving my face into my bed, and pulled my hips to him. My button remained hidden as he groped and held me. What if he found the button? Was he searching for it? Would I be frozen in that moment like that woman in *The Kiss*?

He backed away from me, and sticky wetness glopped onto my leg. He pulled me up. His eyes calmed as if his soul returned. He smiled and walked out of my room, closing the door behind him.

The leathery, orange smell from his cologne consumed the room. Curled up in a ball on the floor, I wrapped my arms around chest. My throat was raw. When the sun came up, I went to the bathroom and showered. I pulled the sheets off my bed and laid down on the bare mattress.

Weeks. Years. I was numb to time. I lost myself in darkness—disconnected from the world, sleepwalking through life. In retrospect, I don't know how I managed to finish college. After graduation, I worked waiting on tables while I





pursued an acting career. I got auditions and even some minor roles. I assumed casting agents rejected me because I was damaged. I kept my boobs set at As for years after that, barely looking or touching my body, except to bathe. I didn't discuss what happened to me. I didn't even admit it to myself. I didn't know what I felt. I was numb.

There was a period when I was twenty-five, I stopped bathing. I stopped going to auditions. I spent most of the time watching nothing but home improvement shows about remodeling and house flipping. Getting out of bed felt like dragging an elephant across the highway. Every night, I relived my assault in my sleep. His face loomed over me. His hands grabbed my throat. I cried and wrapped my arms around my chest. Snot poured down my face. After I didn't answer the phone or the door for two weeks, Vera, my oldest and dearest friend, dragged me to a therapist. She didn't ask what was wrong with me, and I couldn't tell her. After I spent months in therapy saying I was just depressed, I finally admitted what I never told anyone. I felt as if I relived that night.

A week later, my therapist managed to convince me to seek rape counseling. I sat alone in the waiting room of the rape crisis center. It had Pepto Bismol pink wallpaper, muted floral upholstered armchairs, and no waiting room music. One fluorescent bulb flickered, casting a

shadow and a slight smoke trail that smelled of ozone around the room. I walked into the counselor's office dragging my feet across the carpet, my hair standing on end.

I sat across from my counselor with my feet planted flat on the floor, back straight against the saggy leather chair.

"Start from the beginning," she said.

"I let a boy up to my room in college and grabbed me and forced himself on me." I reported what happened. I couldn't use the word "rape."

"How could I trust him? Why didn't I know that he was a monster? Why did I let him in my room?"

"It wasn't your fault," My counselor said, but I didn't believe her.

After I started getting counseling for my rape, I was able to return to acting. I auditioned for a deodorant commercial. The casting agent commented that I would look perfect for the role if I had bigger boobs. He whispered loudly and pointed at my chest. I laughed.

At home, after my shower, I stood before the bathroom mirror instead of running from it. Why had I thought that my femininity was stored in my boobs? The water evaporated off my skin, and I slathered on coconut oil. My legs pushed against the earth, my back held my body upright.

I tried to adjust the button. What size did I try?



I don't remember. The button was frozen into place, and I smiled. It was one month before my twenty-sixth birthday.

D.

One day as I walked to get to a foot powder audition, I watched a woman. She wore one of those body contour dresses in blood red with gold stilettos. She was not the tiniest woman, and her make-up was a little too thick, but her shoulders were straight and her ankles dainty. She tossed her curly black hair down her back as she strutted passed everyone. My hair goes to my ears. Her boobs bounced rhythmically as she walked. This woman had skin that begged to be touched. I walked behind her, my huge feet clapping along the sidewalk. My idea of femininity had been wrapped up in body image, but watching this woman reminded me that femininity had nothing to do with the actual body but with the way that a woman carried it. I was mesmerized, not by her body, but by her confidence.

DD.

I gave birth to my daughter on a rainy Friday. Everything happened so quickly. She was almost delivered on the highway. My husband drove faster than a NASCAR driver in the final lap. When we got to the emergency room, the doctor sent us to the delivery room right away.

My contractions rushed in. Every six minutes,

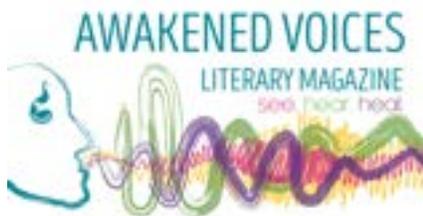
every two minutes, every thirty seconds. It's not like on TV with all the screaming and swearing. I didn't have the energy. My body just took over on instinct, bearing down with each contraction as the baby inched out. That big head burned as it slid out. I held my daughter to my chest and then we both became still. I worried that my milk wouldn't let down. All the pain in my body turned off. She snuggled up against me and began to nurse as if she would never eat again; the sound of her feeding was like a waitress smacking gum. Her baby skin was so soft, and she smelled like heaven. The rain stopped, and the sun came out. I kept touching her, afraid that she might disappear. I worried about my daughter being in this world.

Raised in Philadelphia, **Trish Rodriguez** now resides in Media, PA. She graduated from Rosemont College MFA in Creative Writing Program. Fiction writing is her dream.

AWAKENINGS

Awakened Voices is a literary program of Awakenings, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a physical and virtual artistic space in which to promote the healing of survivors through the arts and engage in an open dialogue that furthers awareness and understanding of sexual violence. Please consider helping us spread our message of healing by sharing and supporting Awakenings.

Awakenings' mission is to provide survivors of sexual violence with a trauma informed, inclusive art-making experience that encourages healing.



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