

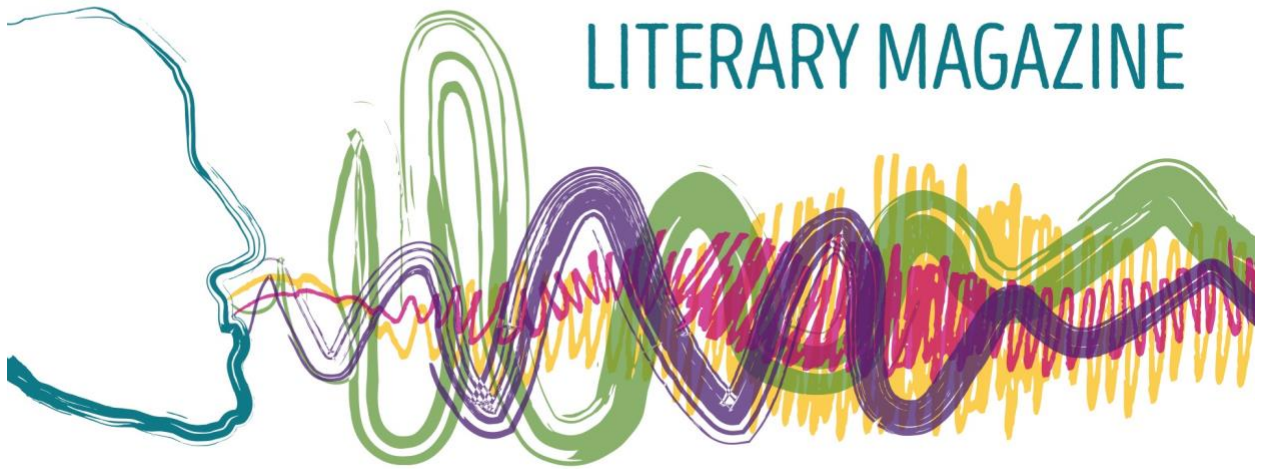
Issue 7

Here, There, and Everywhere

December 2018

AWAKENED VOICES

LITERARY MAGAZINE



ISSUE 7: HERE, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE

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An Introduction from the Editing Team

At Awakened Voices we focus each issue around a guiding theme. As the end of 2018 approaches, our local community in Chicago, the bigger landscape of the United States, and the global community have all been in great need of healing. Writers and survivors are coming to us from around the world looking for a creative outlet and a place to process the prevalence of rape culture in individual lives as well as in public culture. Our guiding theme for this issue is the idea that not only sexual violence, but also survival and people affected by sexual violence are here in our home, there in our neighbors or faraway places, and in truth, it is everywhere as it is ingrained in the foundations of so many cultures. Can we also find healing, trust, and change in each culture? Can we start with ourselves and spread healing and belief outwards? Perhaps when we cannot find light within ourselves, we can turn to writers to show us a way.

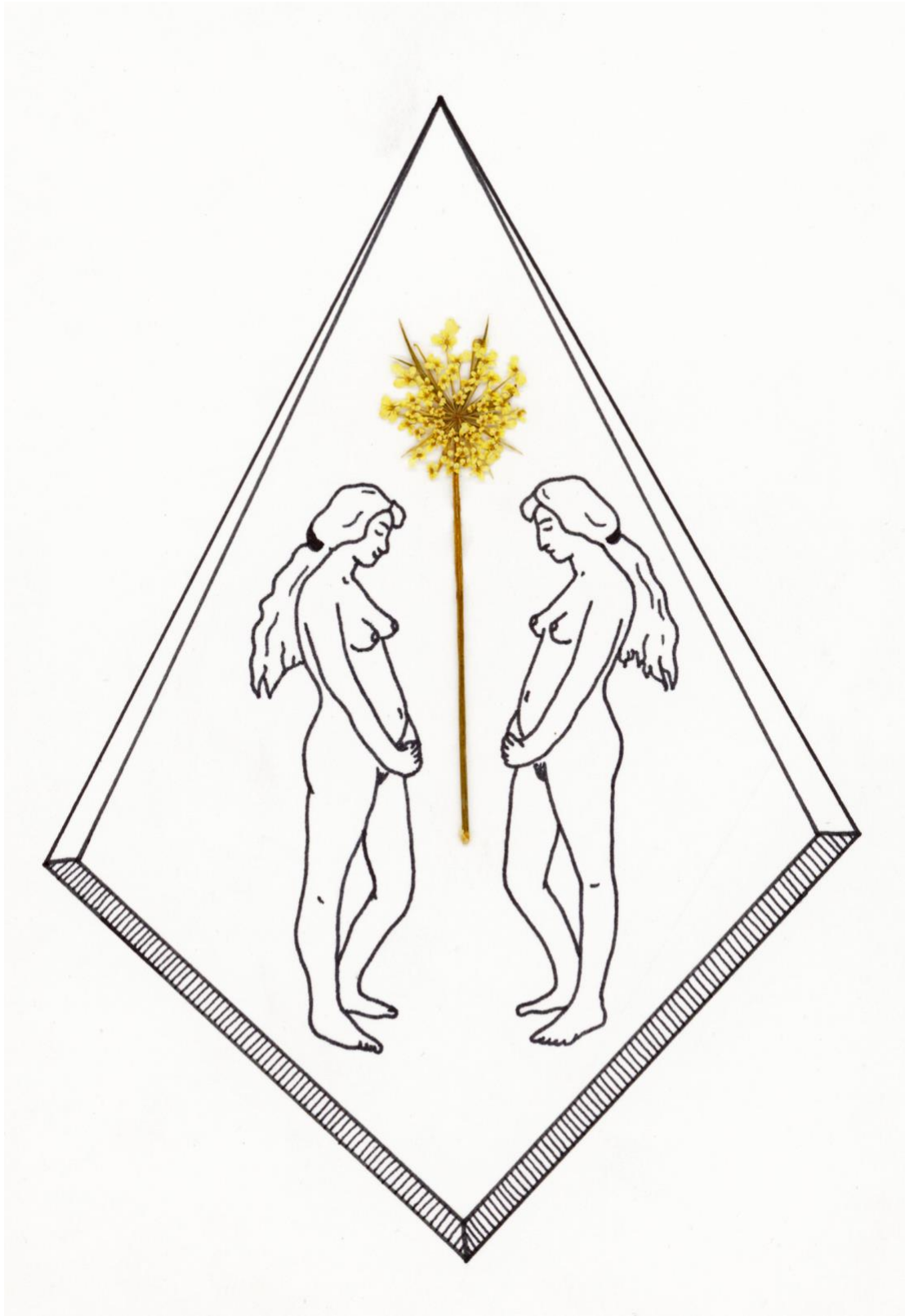
This issue brings together many voices with many backgrounds, and we believe each voice to be a creative expression of truth and of healing. We find healing not only as writers but also as readers through believing others and finding compassion, advocacy, and strength in ourselves unlocked through the unbelievable strength, bravery, and testament to the human spirit through the writers in these pages. As a society we are listening to survivors of sexual violence more than ever before. We must continue to listen and to hold out the microphone for survivors to speak their truth.

Also a very special addition to this magazine issue, for the first time, we are including two writers whose pieces each began in a writing workshop at Awakenings. We encourage more of this crossing over from inspiration and learning in workshop into publication through Awakened Voices.

Readers and writers, may you find healing and truth that breaks the chains of silence and begins to heal guilt and shame. May you enjoy the talents and creativity of these writers. From our world to yours, we hope you learn, enjoy, and find your own creative expressions as we share in these with you.

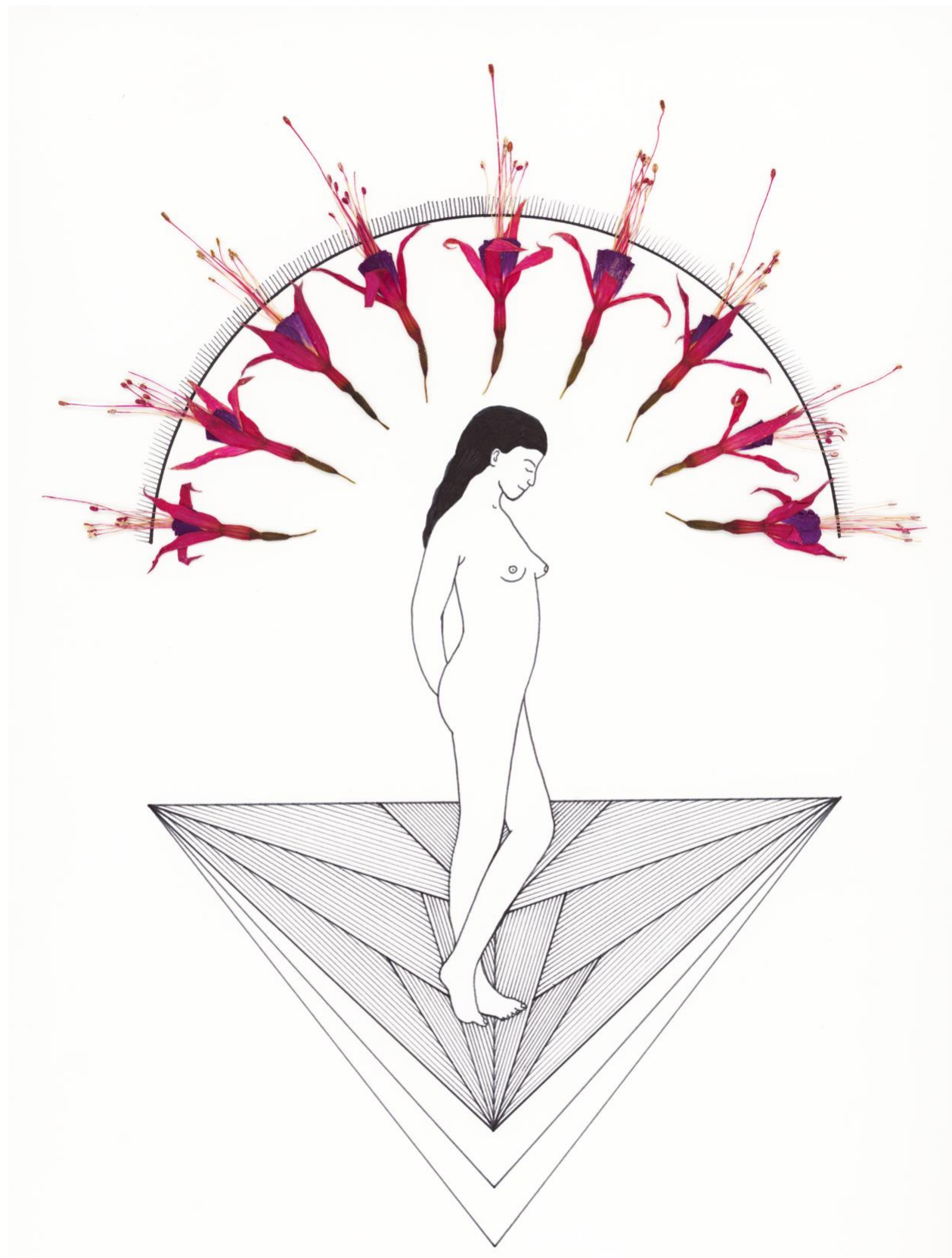
Note from Executive Director, Laura Kinter

When Awakenings launched a literary magazine, Awakened Voices, in 2015, we sought out every single piece that was published in our first issue. Now, hundreds of survivors from all over the globe are sharing their stories with us. To meet this demand, Awakened Voices has added serials and (very soon) a blog to our literary offerings. While our four walls are in Chicago, Awakened Voices has built a bridge between us and survivors all over the world looking for someone to listen. It is my hope that those bridges multiply and strengthen, and that no matter where you are, you may find hope, comfort, and healing in our brand-new issue "Here, There, and Everywhere."











“Pressed is a series that responds to my personal experience with sexual trauma. Each piece contains flowers I have pressed in my journal from travels or walks through my own home town. The idea of something naturally growing and beautiful being plucked and compressed against its will speaks to the abuse I have endured. Although these specimens have been pressed, they have lived on in a new and beautiful way.”

Megan Karson is a multidisciplinary artist living in Kansas City, Missouri. She draws, paints, shoots film, and makes soft sculptures. Her work reflects the experiences she has in the world and in her own mind and hopes to speak to her audiences with compassion and a sense of connectedness. We all have a story and we all deserve for those stories to be heard or seen.

One Breath

by Jessica Granger

Breathe in. It's the last thing I do before she pushes me under again. I'm at a birthday party for one of the girls at my school. All of the fifth graders in my town have a separate school called Central 5 before we are split up into the multiple middle schools throughout the territory. She isn't really nice to me, but her family is wealthy and I like to spend my weekends at their house just to feel what it's like to be someone other than myself.

There's a boy named Tim in our class that we both like. He's been paying more attention to me than she appreciates at this party. I'm in the pool, my arms crossed on the tiled ledge, head cradled between them as the sun bakes the left side of my face. I'm talking to another girl perched on the edge of the pool, her legs swirling water beside me, the motion lulling me as we talk. The birthday girl swims over and gets behind me, whispers in my ear, tickling the drying fly-away hairs on my face, "You know I like Tim."

I turn and look at her, shrug my shoulders at her anger as if it doesn't bother me either way.

I do this a lot as a tween, shrug when I feel uncomfortable, when I want to fit in, when I don't want to speak my mind and get rejected by my middle-class schoolmates. Maybe I do it because I tend to slur languages when I become tired or very angry and I find it embarrassing, I don't know. I do it so often, I find myself doing it in the mirror, responding to my own unasked questions when I notice my body starting to change.

My friend doesn't back off. I can feel the heat of her anger through the water. She pushes my shoulders hard enough that I let go of the ledge to avoid hitting my face on the tiles. I turn around to ask what her problem is, but she jumps on me, wraps her arms and legs around mine like an octopus, our torsos touching as she immobilizes my limbs. I sink into the pool from the weight. I try to get free.

She needs to breathe and finally releases me long enough to pop to the surface. I follow her, sputtering in shock. The other kids start to laugh as they come over to see what's happening, but it just fuels her anger more. She puts her torso on top of my head and pushes me back down, holding me under while she stays above the water this time, laughing with everyone else as I struggle.

My lungs start to burn as I panic. I think she is going to kill me over a boy, one I'd never truly want anyway. *Being a girl is so stupid*, I think to myself as I squeeze both of her calves with my hands in an effort to bring her down into the water with me. The more I fight her, the more the air escapes from my lungs and I realize I'm done, out of air, and at her mercy.

I hear shouting that's loud even beneath the surface before two strong arms covered in gold bracelets that scrape my skin reach into the water and grab for me. I have no energy in my limbs, pulling a caught fish routine as I'm lifted out of the pool. I lay limply on the concrete to catch my breath where the birthday girl's mother manages to drag me. She asks if I'm okay as chlorinated water seeps from my nose and mouth and I whisper the word *mom* from a raw throat.

Breathe out. It's the first thing I do when he enters my room and slams me against the old oak door of my closet. He wrestles my training bra off first, the pink clasp in the front flying open under the pressure of his thick fingers. His mouth is all over me, the nasty stench of his saliva in my nose and coating my teeth as he forces his way inside.

He is trying to shove his fingers into my vagina as I scream, but his father and my mother are at work. His weight suspends my smaller body like an insect on a pin as his hand finally breeches my panties and makes contact.

He's mumbling words as we struggle, me trying to drop my pelvis while he pushes in deep enough to hurt me.

You want it...you've been asking for it...you're a slut.

He is here, he says, to make sure I know exactly how much of a tease I am.

The times I leave the bathroom door open as I lean over, ass up, to blow-dry my hair in a tank top and small shorts. The times I dress in skirts and knee-highs for church on Sundays because I know he likes them.

I sob like a keening animal, beg him to stop, to get off of me, but he just laughs as he leans down to suck my small breast into his mouth. I thrash against him, his teeth burrowing into my skin, the pain forming in thin red circles along my chest and collarbone. I'm able to gain some leverage and slip out from beneath him when he leans down. I run toward the hall door, but his high school football conditioning gives him the advantage to reach the door first. He slams what little I manage to open shut with my body, smashing my face into the panel, the crystal knob digging into my rib as it bends from the pressure.

I struggle to suck in air through the crushing pressure of his weight. I promise him that I will make sure everyone knows what happened as he grinds his erection into my ass. He chuckles darkly in a voice that no longer cracks and says, "My father says you will never grow up and amount to anything."

I don't respond. He's right; my mother's boyfriend, my acting stepfather at the time, does say those exact words. He says them so often, I too have memorized them. I'm the hypersexual black sheep of our disjointed family. I don't quite fit in. I'm angry all the time.

The front door opens and I can hear my biological brother and his friends rolling their bikes into the front foyer. He releases me suddenly, opening the door, and slowly walking down the hallway and up the attic stairs to his room as if he was just in the bathroom next to my room. I'm still there in the doorway when my brother shuffles up the stairs. He stops to look at me, but my vision gets blurry as tears flood my vision.

He points to my tank top and I look down. The two halves of my bra are pulled through the arms of the tank, stretched to the limit of the fabric. I have red welts on my arms and thighs.

My brother doesn't speak.

He walks over and unscrews the old style latch on the outside of my door, the type that has a long hook that fits into a metal hole on the other side. He gently moves me back into my room and begins twisting the locking mechanism into the wood on the inside of my door jamb with his bare hands. He turns to look at me when it's in place.

"Now, no one can get in unless you want them to," he says, before he leaves and I rush to lock myself in, throw myself back against it and slide slowly to the floor to hug knees to my bruised chest.

Jessica M Granger holds an MFA from the University of Texas El Paso. She is an Army veteran, divemaster, mother, and survivor of sexual assault. Jessica was being threatened by someone she thought once loved her, to expose the details of this story, and instead, wanted to confess and take back the power of survivorship, of womanhood, and of the strength in numbers. She says, "This piece is important to share with the world because of the current societal climate on victimhood and also because I don't want any other girls out there believing something like this could ever be their fault. To anyone suffering, you are not alone."

He Wears Bloody Chinos

by Katie Krantz

Intra-vaginal stitches are especially daunting at age fourteen. Being rushed to a hospital in a foreign country in your dorm advisor's sweatpants while nearly bleeding out can't be much better. When I first met the girl who nearly bled out, I was sitting on the plane to Beijing for a summer immersion program. Catherine Helms was the girl with home-dyed hair and hickies on her neck who is inexplicably smarter and more accomplished than you. She's a mixed drink of insanity, immaturity, and genius. She had the face of a kid that day, all wide-eyed and rosy-cheeked at the age of fourteen.

When we were assigned Chinese classes, I wasn't sorted into the level with Catherine. I was with Catherine's roommate, who, while young, was a native-level Mandarin speaker because of her Taiwanese heritage. Tally and I picked up a habit of going on late-night bubble tea runs. Catherine would occasionally come with us. One night, we were sitting on the steps of the university, cold cement leeching heat from our thighs, drinking bubble tea when Catherine decided to confess something quite personal.

"I really want to lose my virginity on this trip."

"What?" said Tally and I in unison. Catherine just shrugged and took a sip of tea.

"Why?" I asked.

"To who?" Tally questioned. To answer both questions, Catherine gave us a look of casual disinterest and continued to drink. She didn't seem to want to talk about her personal goals anymore, so we finished up our teas and called it a night.

The lock on my dorm room door was broken. It would often swing open randomly, forcing my roommate and I to stack books behind it, just in case. The laundry room was on the girls' side of the hallway, so most of the boys knew that our door had the potential to open itself if there was too large a draft from them walking by. For the most part they politely ignored our vulnerability, except for Zach Jacobson.

Zach did not understand courtesy. I was changing when he burst into my room in search of a hair dryer. Standing in a sports bra and athletic shorts, I screamed at him to get out.

"What? It's nothing that I haven't seen before," he said nonchalantly. "I'm a senior, you know." He made no move to leave. He stood in the doorway, his flat eyes languidly focused on (probably) my face.

"Could you please leave? I do not have a hair dryer. I do not know why you need one. I am very uncomfortable right now," I explained. He sighed heavily before turning around and trudging out of my room. Far from my line of sight, Zach's distinct flavor of creepiness was attractive to Catherine like the smell of rotten pork.

While China has no drinking age, the program directors made it clear that we would be sent home for partying. As nerds that chose to spend a month of our summer at Chinese camp, no one broke the rules until our final night.

A cohort of my friends, including Tally, decided to have a sleepover. We pulled our rock-hard mattresses and flat comforters off of our dorm beds and piled them in the middle of my floor. The entire night was spent watching whatever movies we could find on Chinese TV and voicing over whatever we didn't understand with a ridiculous, made-up script. Catherine invited Zach over to her empty room. While we were pretending to be historic Chinese generals, Zach pretended he didn't know that Catherine was barely fourteen. His dead eyes stared into hers, and maybe she saw something alive. He walked out of her room covered in blood. Not his own, of course.

"Hey, Tally, Catherine needs you," he said, popping his head into the sleepover. Tally, assuming there was something she had forgotten to pack, climbed over the tangled mass of limbs and headed down the hall with him. Because he had just poked his head in the door, we couldn't see the river of blood running down his chinos.

Tally never came back to our sleepover that night, and we forgot about it until the morning. Before we were able to ask her where she'd gone, morning roll call began.

They called Catherine's name on the roll and no one answered. As we all looked around for her, one of the dorm advisors hurried up to the one holding the list and whispered in his ear.

He quickly moved on and called the rest of the names. Uncomfortably, all of the girls at the sleepover looked at Tally, who just shrugged. Zach was off in the corner, napping in his hoodie.

He had changed into clean sweats, and none of us knew that he had stashed a pair of bloody men's chinos in a trash can outside the dorm. I didn't know that Catherine was in surgery while I was printing out my boarding pass.

A few months later, I visited Tally in New York City. We went out to lunch and walked around SoHo, talking about our happy memories of bubble tea and curious adventures abroad.

"What ever happened to Catherine? I heard that she was in the hospital... was she okay?" I asked over an artisanal BBQ flatbread. Tally proceeded to relate the entire story to me as my jaw slowly dropped onto the floor of the restaurant.

"Yeah, that's why she missed the group flight home," Tally explained. "She texted me afterwards that she somehow blames herself. She thinks that she should have been wetter."

"She wasn't mad at Zach?" I was dumbfounded. Zach should have been old enough to realize that sex with a kid isn't a brilliant idea. The age of consent exists for a reason.

"Not really. I think they still text sometimes," Tally said. The chinos sat in a far-off Chinese dump, out of sight. Catherine wore Birkenstocks around Portland. Tally and I tried and failed to forget Zach's cold, dead eyes.

Katie Krantz is a student and writer based in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Red String of Fate

by Tina Rose

“A wise woman once spoke to me while I slept. She was my ancestor. Try as I could when I woke, I could not remember what she had said to me but my heart remembers and that is good.” –April Peerless

Have you ever noticed others, including famous Hollywood actors and even members of the first family wearing red bracelets that are sometimes made from bits of string or braided? You may wonder if this is a trend or a fashion statement, but it actually has significant meaning. The red bracelets can hold great energy and power for the wearer; and these bracelets can also build upon the wearer's core - developing character and inner strength; they also can carry the hopes and dreams from the wearer to the heavens above. The red bracelets, no matter what they are made of – even if but a piece of thread, have the power to protect the wearer from the evils in this world. What could give such power to a bracelet? Where can you get one?

“At the center of your being you have the answer – you know who you are and you know what you want.” –Lao Tzu

You. The answer is you. After all, the idea of giving significant personal meaning to inanimate objects has been happening with mankind for centuries. So maybe its not just you, its all of us, including myself. Red thread bracelets have been used for many reasons for centuries and have taken on deep religious meaning in a variety of religions, including Judaism and Christianity. The idea of the red thread bracelet in Christianity dates as far back to Genesis 38:27-30. Here it describes Tamar going into birth with twins, fathered by Judah, her own father-in-law. During child birth, one twin's hand comes forward, and it is described that the midwife quickly tied the wrist with scarlet thread declaring it to be the first born. However, the hand disappeared and when the first twin was finally born, there was no string! Amazed, she declared him to be called, Pharez. The next child, of course, was born with the scarlet thread and was named Zarah.

“Make the best use of what is in your power and take the rest as it happens.” –Epictetus

The idea of the red thread bracelet has crossed many cultures and religious barriers to be eventually made a part of their own teachings. While there are no written connections to the Kabbalah or other religious writings many religions have the red string bracelet as a part of what their followers wear or participate in. The red string is a traditional Jewish belief that wards off the 'evil eye' or other misfortunes. It is traditionally worn upon the left wrist, as it is considered the receiving side of the spiritual body. Sometimes you will see knots tied into the string, the wearer ties 7 knots into the bracelet while saying a blessing or prayer. In Hinduism, the red string is called kalava, and brings blessings, well-being and prosperity to the wearer. Buddhists hold significant power to the color red and monks often pray holding red string or cord, which is then given to others to wear as a blessing.

“What this power is, I cannot say. All I know is that it exists... and it becomes available only when you are in that state of mind in which you know exactly what you want... and are determined not to quit until you get it.” –Alexander Graham Bell

The Chinese and Japanese legends have a slightly different view and though they are similar - there are many different versions according to region and local histories. In this instance, the red thread worn about the wrist is known as the 'Red Thread of Fate.' The ideas behind the proverbs are that long before we are aware of it we are blessed by a mythical 'red thread of Fate' which connects us to others in our lives who will be significantly important, and that thread may stretch or tangle but it will never break. Many legends associated with this are tied to it being the 'One' or the true love we are destined to be with while others say it could be many of the most important people in our lives, including family, friends, and those we may come across in life in which there is a profound impact between your two lives. I prefer the tale of love, of being mysteriously connected by the Gods, as a blessing to the one you're supposed to be with. However, life doesn't always follow the divine path, and we don't always make the right choices in life.

"I met a boy whose eyes told me that the past, present, and future were all the same things." –Jennifer Elizabeth

In the end, regardless of religion, legend, or love, the real power given to the bracelet comes from within. The color red holds different significance and meanings across cultures and boundaries; but any color chosen by the wearer could hold as much meaning. Again, the power given to the bracelet, which is no more than a personal token, amulet, or talisman, comes from within the heart. Having a strong connection to the piece of jewelry comes from deep personal soul-searching and having a strong sense of what your inner self desires.

Sometimes a piece of jewelry or bracelet will come into your life in a time of need. This may be the true string of Fate. When at your lowest, a bracelet with great meaning behind it is bestowed upon you by someone who cares. I can remember the day when I was feeling at the end of the line in my life, and a very perceptive and talented gentleman stopped to notice my son and I as we browsed through his leather store, Leatherheads. At the time I was going through a great deal of terrifying domestic violence situations and had no idea where my life was headed. The stress of my situation must have shown on my face as I aimlessly strolled through the store. My son was very friendly and enjoyed stopping in to see what the owner was working on when we window-shopped near his favorite book store. As I chatted with the owners a moment while watching my son look around the store, the man, perhaps noticing the healing bruises across my jaw and forehead, showed me a leather bracelet. It was a brown leather cuff style with snap closures and a minimalist design. He said to me, "Don't ever let anyone put holes in your path in life." I began wearing it every day.

"Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life, but define yourself." –Harvey Fierstein

His words held a powerful message for me as I continued on my path. I would wear the bracelet every day, it became an almost signature part of my life. However, in times of stress, sorrow and pain – the bracelet was always there. It was almost comforting, as if someone, somewhere, had a hand around mine whispering, "Come on, there's always another way." I moved forward, facing many difficult challenges along the way, and soon as I felt nearly defeated, it was over. The day came when I walked free of the abuse of another human being, free from domestic violence and for the first time in my life – free to live and choose for myself. I understood, then, how the bracelet came in to play giving me the strength to not give up, and to move forward - learning to appreciate the good in the world and walk away from my negative past. It probably saved my life. No. I know it did.

I eventually had to stop wearing my bracelet. It had been worn for so many years that it was beginning to wear and crack along the design inside the cuff. I value it so much, that I've put it away for only special occasions. It was very well made and lasted long through the journey we were meant to take together. I had escaped the circumstances in which it had found me. Knowing how close I was to death's door makes me thankful that I had been blessed with such a powerful object. One that provided me with comfort, assurance, strength and courage to fight through to reach better days.

"There are things that we never want to let go of, people we never want to leave behind. But keep in mind that letting go isn't the end of the world, it's the beginning of a new life." –Unknown

I realize, today, the power in the bracelet was the energy and focus I had put into it. It was the desperate desire to reach my goals despite any hardship or fires I had to walk through. It could have been any color bracelet, mine was brown – though I also believe it was a connection to the pattern in the words of advice given that made this particular bracelet make sense to me and my situation. It allowed me to bond and have a sincere heart-felt focus attached to a piece of leather around my wrist. I believe bracelets wield such power not only because of the significance we place upon them but because of the location worn on the body. Many who wear the red bracelets choose their left wrists, which is significant in tradition, but as ninety percent of humanity is right-handed, it is also the side most protected. I also believe the red bracelets stand out as a constant visual reminder that never leaves, helping the wearer to visual their goals more clearly – making attaining them a priority to work on over other things of less importance.

Many of these traditions speak of gifting these red bracelets. Some say to hold them dear, and only gift them to someone truly special in your life. In others, townspeople receive blessed cord for the making of special bracelets from the monks. A few say its to give to those you care about but be sure to reach out to others you see in need, too. I would have to say I fall in with the latter group. I believe a blessing is something special, a bit of heaven to cherish to keep close and hold dear. However, I do believe if heaven has blessed you and you have the opportunity to share, do so. Reach out to that someone who needs you and give them the strength they need to get to where they need to be in life. Be someone else's red string of Fate.

"One of our greatest tests is to see if we are able to bless someone else while we are going through our own storm." –Unknown

Tina Lenore Rose, writer, poet, artist, part-time editor and full-time animal lover writes from personal experience that helps to relate to the many areas covered by assignments. Tina enjoys spending time with their dogs and getting out to learn about a variety of community events in their area. Tina believes that making a difference in any area starts from within and being motivated enough to be the one to step forward.

When Will It Change

By Lynn Healy

I've always wondered why I was so "messed up."

I was 19 when the bulimia began. By my twenties I added drinking straight vodka, doing drugs, popping pills, and if none of those worked - banged my head into walls.

What is the underbelly?

Self-hatred... Self-loathing... And lots - of excruciating pain.

I lost every job. I eventually raged on every man. I could trust no one and always chose men that couldn't be trusted. Painful, gut-wrenching, heart breaking failures, that I repeated endlessly. In other words; I never learned.

Anything.

Inappropriate anger, a "bad attitude", outbursts of rage, ruined friendships, resentment of authority, burned bridges. Chaos. All these agonizing patterns of failure: at work, in romance, almost everywhere continued - year after year after year.

Who has the capacity to figure out "the cause"? When you are that lost, you are a resident of Zomboland. I could see exactly one foot in front of me. You blame yourself - imagine the hot bath and the razor blade, or you point finger in rage, again. You apologize - or scorch another burnt bridge. You hate yourself... pound your head with your fists... And then it's tomorrow.

Suicidal ideation. Two attempts. The psych-ward lockdowns.

Then finally, in my 40's, a family member died, and the Great Revelation finally came. Finally Now I knew who my perpetrator was; 'exactly what had been done to me; ' his friends that were involved... and it started when I was 4 years old.

After two years the professionals convinced me that I must tell my family. I was terrified - but I told them.

And I was banished.

No sympathy - just rejection. No questions or curiosity - just Don't show your face, and do not call. And it stuck.

I didn't see my family for 7 years. No family on Christmas or Thanksgiving. I missed all my niece's and nephew's birthdays. Every one of these, I knew they were celebrating together, and that I was not to show my face.

As I write this, sometimes the hurtfulness hits me.... sometimes.

And when I'm able to, I look around me. I see women coming forward; stories similar to mine. And my heart lifts it's head in surprise. The "Time's Up" and "Me Too" movements! Women all over, standing up to The Dominator! I marvel in disbelief. I am stunned... I'm impressed! And I'm happy. But the moments of justice - how long do they last? We chalk up a few victories, then our momentum fades. And in the long run, how much do we win?

Then the public mauling of Women's Worth in a courtroom. It is fortunately televised and conveniently fixed. The joke of jurisdiction, the Hill's charade on parade. And sick, twisted joke, that is Kavanaugh. Again my heart cowers. We watch the Grand Ol' Patriarchy, lurch back on the scene. There is nowhere to look - but at that evil in action. The powerful soul-dead slash yet another's reputation; and they threaten her life. And the creepy old men put a perpetrator, a perjurer, and an ass with a gavel, in one of most powerful seats in the world.

Sometimes we win. Then we fight and we lose. If the stakes are small, they might throw us a bone, a Cosby, a Nassar or a Weinstein. But when stakes are high, they ride in on dark horses...

And as we punch in the dark, I always get that feeling - they are watching, and pointing, as they laugh.

The same laughter I heard when I was 4 years old... and Dr. Ford's worst memory: how they laughed.

So we are mere butts of their joke. Defenseless young lives being mutilated to shreds. Adult women - now traumatized; changed.

While they stand casually, ‘ look down, and they laugh

~

I gaze on from my place; wrestling on the floor with my shame - and I wonder - What *will* it take to stop this insanity?! Okay, I know we can’t stop it, but my God - can’t we do something to at least *slow them down*?

I’m not saying that I have the answer.

What I am is Aware. I see the “elephant in the room” that is sexual abuse and I choose *not* to ignore it. Every fiber of my being won’t let me ignore it. The taboos are strong, the task is daunting - and I’m clear on the insidiousness of their game.

Childhood sexual abuse mauled every aspect of my life. And I wonder - does it have to continue to maul others? The young me was never saved, but can’t we do something for the millions being abused now - and the thousands *about to be*?

All of it makes me sick, like I know it does so many of us....

But is there a time we can speak up for the children?

Will. It. Ever. Change?

Lynn Healy has reckoned with “bulimia, drugs, alcohol, suicide attempts; lock-down psych wards; domestic violence shelters. And Despised self. Then... Trauma therapy; feeling my shame leave me; stunning awakenings; feeling human... And liking Me”.

On Victim/Survivor

by Katie Kolon

I do not like the word victim nor survivor.

"Survivor" is a euphemism, suggesting that whatever you survived is over. Yet what lingers is damage to your soul. While physical wounds may heal, the emotional and psychological toll stays with you forever. But the anger that unsettles the soul also motivates into action. Survivors have agency and in agency there is power. "Survivor" may also harbor an illusion of not needing anything from anyone.

By contrast, "victim" implies passivity and removes responsibility, which helps to place blame where it is deserved. But by placing blame on the abuser, you recognize their power and the power they took from you. This transgression of power is uncomfortable to acknowledge for any victim as no one likes feeling powerless. Victims receive support but require others to act for them, to believe them, to pity them, to provide retribution for them. And when we focus on blaming perpetrators and helping victims, we are blind to the systems of oppression that facilitate victimization.

I find these labels reductive, confining, and even dangerous. While I am shaped by my experiences, I am so much more than a survivor, or a victim and I will not be defined by the expectations that come with them. Our culture has certain views of victims/survivors about how they should act, react, suffer and recover. In a world where accounts of abuse are one person's word against another's, the performance of credibility is set by those cultural expectations and therein lies danger.

Christine Blasey Ford is a successful professor and expert in the field of psychology. She is a published author and researcher. She is a mother and a wife and much, much more. Yet in order for her testimony against Brett Kavanaugh to be successful, she had to play the role of victim and appear damaged enough that she would be believed. I am not suggesting that her feelings and comments were not genuine, but I am highlighting that she was required to reduce herself to a victim in the eyes of the public, and that is painful. It is painful to relive your experiences publicly. It is painful to lose your entire identity in becoming a victim. It is even more painful when upon transforming into a victim, still you are not believed. As Dr. Ford said, "Why suffer through the annihilation if it's not going to matter?"

Sexual assault robs your humanity, both in the moment, and in the act of applying these constraining labels. If we could resist the urge to view someone through the lens of victim/survivor, we could change the cultural norms that dictate how we must behave in order to be believed. There is no right or wrong way to feel or act or be after a sexual assault. I deserve to be believed; we all deserve to be believed. There is nothing for an individual to gain by coming forward, but we as a society have much to gain by making space for victims/survivors to do so.

I am a friend, a daughter, a sister, and a lover. I am a cyclist, a lawyer, a mediator, and an InfoSec nerd. I am courageous, and I am kind. I have anger, and I have hurt. I have fear, and I have hope. I need love and support, and I can support and love others as well. I am a victim and a survivor. I am the same person now as I always was. I am a complex human being and I want to be acknowledged for everything that I am.

Katie Kolon is a lawyer, mediator, and information security professional. She recently launched www.aconybellproject.org for people to document, store, and share their personal stories of sexual violence. Her project aims to raise awareness through personal connections and shift the burden of carrying these experiences from the individual to society.

Testosterone and Loathing In the Land of Plenty by Reg Darling

It's quite understandable that conservatives, especially evangelical Christians, are panicking. They wanted new wallpaper, and these women are tearing out walls.

[It gives them the heebie-jeebies.]

They believe that western culture is splitting apart at the seams and the first seam to go is the crotch of its pants. They're right.

[It doesn't give me the heebie-jeebies.]

They're scared shitless.

[I'm scared too, but not quite shitless.]

Minds are suffocating, and people are being killed.

[I don't want to steal any airtime from women who are speaking up—they are owed plenty of that—but it is incumbent on men to honestly reflect on their own lives and thoughts. This should not happen in secrecy or silence. Substituting male silence for female silence doesn't have a lot of problem-solving potential, even though the women sure could use a break.]

There's a lot I can't pretend to understand—I suspect my personal history is relatively atypical even for my strange generation (the first wave of baby boomers/hippies). I had (and of course, still have) PTSD and chronic depression. My parents gave me this illness. Though they didn't intend to do the kind of lasting damage they did, it isn't like they accidentally sneezed on the salad, either. My father had (officially undiagnosed) PTSD brought home from World War Two and Okinawa, and my mother was batshit crazy—probably a sociopath. I graduated from high school in the summer of love (1967) and began college in the fall. I had a Mensa-level IQ and I was utterly fucking clueless. When the wave that rushed out of Hashbury reached rural Pennsylvania a year later, the personal qualities that had made me a nerd in high school made me attractive in college.

So, if I'm going to speak about even one corner of the multifaceted gawd-awful brutality of gender in the present, I need to begin with full disclosure, because patriarchal culture is an immensely complex fabric woven from countless threads of silence.

[I navigate to relevance intuitively as I search through memory. I apologize in advance for unknown failures.]

From 1968 to 1980, I typically had four or five sexual partners per year—fewer when I was living with a lover, but my monogamy was largely circumstantial. I can't recall a single relationship that began with a conversation about whether we wanted to have sex—not one. At some point, when it was obvious where we were imminently going, I *usually* asked, “Are we safe?” My question was in reference to potential pregnancy.

[The pill was fairly ubiquitous and horrible sexually transmitted diseases were not.]

Attractions were spontaneous and intuitive. There were miscalculations. I can recall a couple of occasions when my kiss/embrace/touch was unwelcome—it wasn't difficult to perceive because desire was what I desired and its absence was powerful. Such moments were searingly embarrassing and my apologies were immediate. I never felt the slightest glimmer of urge to be aggressive. There were also times when I was on the receiving end of unwelcome touch. The women seemed more hurt than embarrassed, and it all just seemed sad. Among the people I tended to hang out with, these blunders were just life, and we gave each other plenty of slack as long as nobody got ornery and nobody got ripped off.

Once in my wandering hippie days when I spent a couple of months with my parents, the wife of one of my father's colleagues took a fancy to me at a party. She was drunk and relentless. When she put her hand on my inner thigh, I leaned in and said in a low voice, “If you don't leave me alone, I'll throw you in the fucking pool.” She laughed and failed to comply. I threw her in the pool. Though I have to

admit it pretty much ruined the party, I felt completely justified, and my father found it far funnier than he dared admit.

[Her heavily bleached hair turned green from the chlorine.]

I've been outside the world of seeking new sexual and/or romantic relationships since 1980 and I can't claim to have much first-hand knowledge about how the social rituals and protocols of courtship and desire have changed in the past forty years, but surely they have changed. Customs evolve. Amidst those swirling, shifting cultural currents, there is something big and stiff that hasn't changed—male dominance. What collective male dominance requires of individual men is utter subservience to an obsolete inherited barbarism—patriarchal culture's hot, throbbing oxymoron.

My last field interview of the day was scheduled for four o'clock—I got there a few minutes early.

[I didn't like to be late when dealing with so many people who needed to learn how to be on time.]

It was a pretty routine case. My client was a waitress with two kids and no man. She underreported her tips, and I didn't give a shit.

[Republican politicians did and they still do now.]

"Oh, Mr. Darling, I would do anything to keep my food stamps and medical card," she said.

"Well, all you have to do is answer some questions, verify some information, and sign some papers—it's easy."

On the drive home, I realized that in portions of her past and present doing "anything" was the deal by which she and her kids survived.

[There was nothing I could do about that.]

Nowadays, men are scrambling to plea bargain rape down to assault, assault down to boorishness, boorishness down to drunkenness, and drunkenness down to cluelessness in an endless regression of self-doubt that most men are socially forbidden to talk about. The immediate aftermath is not likely to be cool.

[No shit, Sigmund.]

But we have to talk about it. We have to reinvent our culture. It's the only way we can rid ourselves of the pain we have invented, inflicted, and enshrined.

[Failure is not an option.]

The realization men are recoiling from now is that even if they have refrained from sexual aggression not merely as a choice, but also as an ingrained quality of character, even if they have consciously bristled at the visible injustices of sexism for decades, they have engaged in socially toxic behaviors.

I'm not saying that all or most men typically ache with violent lust and/or pathological urges to dominate. I am saying that we've been adrift and clueless in the ubiquitous social conditioning of a patriarchal culture that taught us to behave like assholes as a kind of default setting. Patriarchy has given men as foul a psychological and spiritual fucking over as women. That we got the less constantly painful end of the well-polished turd hasn't been quite as lucky as it might seem.

Most males have engaged in behaviors that exist on a spectrum of behavior that includes rape even though most have never engaged in overt sexual aggression. I think those behaviors cross over the twilight zone between innocence and dominance long before they manifest as overt aggression. This does not make us all de facto rapists, but it does require us to examine, with a mercilessly critical eye, the complex web of social constructs that define our largely unspoken vision of manhood. We have to shed the cluelessness that until now has been our primary absolution.

That's what the breaking of women's silence means: it reduces the complexity, ambiguity, and nuance of complicity to a binary choice. The middle ground has been washed away by a torrent of women's anguished voices. Resistance is the only alternative to complicity.

We need to redefine manhood. This will take a while and the early years will be a real son-of-a-bitch.

Meanwhile, though rigidity tends to be contrary to resiliency, and pontificating has a short half-life in its atomic decay into self-parody, there are a few aspects of the current version that warrant active resistance:

A capacity for histrionic violence seen as manly virtue.

Sex as dominance or conquest.

Power as an intrinsic satisfaction, not merely as a tool.

Willingness to use physical domination and/or implicit threats of violence in social interactions.

Misogyny trivialized by and/or disguised as humor.

Male entitlement to sexual gratification.

Regarding empathy as a weakness (a clever way of not admitting one is afraid of it).

Zero sum worldview.

[And hey guys, since we're on the subject of toxic masculinity, what's this shit with the assault weapons? We need to have a large, long collective conversation about our violence. You can't deny that the let's-freak-out-and-spray-bullets crew looks a lot like a boy's club.]

Wilbur was crazy—I mean full blown, potentially dangerous, batshit crazy. Though he thought he was much smarter than he was, he wasn't stupid. The director of the welfare office walked past the reception area just as one of my caseworkers called Wilbur for his application interview. Wilbur's wife remained seated. She radiated an aura of damage.

Wilbur was offended when the caseworker told him his wife's signature would be required on some of the forms, and he demanded to speak to a supervisor—that was me. I said, "Wilbur, your wife is an adult and part of your household. If she is to be included in an assistance grant and a food stamp allotment she needs to be informed of her rights and responsibilities and sign a paper certifying that she has been thus informed. That's the law. I can't change it."

He went out to the reception area and brought her back to the interview booth. She would not make eye contact, but she answered my questions and signed the papers.

A few minutes after Wilbur left, the director came to my office and said, "I saw Wilbur out there today with his wife—that woman is abused—I would bet on it. There needs to be a home visit."

I said, "I agree, but I'm not comfortable sending one of my people out there alone."

"You're right—you and I will go."

[The director was a flagrant womanizer whose management style was to make smiling, slick efforts to psychologically coerce what he could simply ask for. Showing up for work most days around eleven was not an effective leadership strategy. His misogyny-laced humor was lame and crude.]

Later that week, we went out to Wilbur's little cement block efficiency cabin, and yes, that lunatic owned that poor, defeated woman, but there was nothing tangible and legal—not a fucking thing we could do.

We drove back to the office in silence. I could tell the director's guts were churning and for the first time in a couple of years, I liked him.

I understand that sexual abuse generally has to do more with power and a need to exert dominance than with sexual desire. One doesn't have to look very hard to see that, but I have to confess that I don't understand it. I am especially baffled by the seemingly commonplace linkage of power and dominance to sex. That's psychological terra incognita to me—incomprehensible on both sides of that equation.

I have never liked having power over other people.

[I was willing to do it for pay.]

I'm capable of being dominating and physically intimidating in a situation of necessity, but afterward I feel exhausted and depressed.

[Overall, I would prefer dental work.]

That ability has mainly been deployed against fellow males. Most of them were drunk.

[There was a period of time in my life when I left a trail of emotionally wounded women in my wake, but it wasn't due to the commonplace dysfunction(s) of male dominance—I was a different kind of asshole.]

Sex has always been a refuge from power and dominance for me, a place to safely relax into vulnerability, a haven from aggression, not a permission to engage in aggression. While I would love to claim this as a virtue, I can't because virtues are voluntary, and this isn't. It's just the way I am. I don't know where that places me in the spectrum of male character.

[Guys don't talk much about such things.]

Many of the various behaviors that seem arguably "harmless" to the naïve, but clearly exist on the arc of the behavioral spectrum that ends in rape are charged with a hidden undercurrent of primal threat and their cumulative effect is a pervasive atmosphere of silent intimidation. Those of us who earnestly try not to contribute to the fear and intimidation have to realize that the dysfunctions of patriarchy have set the terms by which our actions and interactions are interpreted. Our culture has failed us, and men should be at least as pissed off as the women who are finally speaking out and being heard.

Have you ever hiked in a place of dense cover and plentiful rattlesnakes? I have, and I can tell you that small, innocuous motions—a bird hopping from one low branch to another, a chipmunk ducking into a hole—trigger tiny jolts of alarm that pass so quickly most escape conscious attention. Though you tire a little more quickly than you would otherwise, sometimes you like it—that cranked up awareness gobbling every nuance and detail from the senses can be alluringly vibrant. But when you return to your home or campsite, or even the open space of a trail, your whole body sighs with subtle, delicious relief. What if you felt that hyper-alertness at home, on the street, at work, every time you went to the supermarket—in more places in your life than not? Think about those little trickles of adrenaline, those vague whiffs of fight-flight tension continually streaming through your daily life.

[And by the way, don't talk about it. You have a good life and no right to complain. Hell, it's your own fault anyway—those clothes, that makeup.]

What kinds of twists, kinks, and rages might that carve into your psyche?

[You don't have to physically harm someone to ruin his or her day or week or year.]

I find the apparently commonplace (among males) shutting down of empathy in sexual situations incomprehensible—mine opens wide and I admit that can be risky, but without it so much would probably seem dead and strange. It's a moot point because I can't control it—I open up—that's just how it works for me. So, one of my problems in attempting to write about this is that men are doing shit that I cannot sensibly imagine.

[The idea of wanting to grab a stranger's ass, genitals, or breast seems simply and self-evidently deranged.]

But violent abuse and rape are simply the far end of the spectrum of male dominant behavior in patriarchal culture. It's not difficult to backtrack along that spectrum until you find your own behavior (especially with help from women who are forsaking their silence) and when you do, you find yourself face to face with a moral imperative.

[I'm not necessarily a nonviolent guy—I try to be, and I've gotten pretty good at it, but some of my early programming was really fucking gnarly. There are women dear to me who have been raped, and I have seen their scars up close. If you gave me a time machine, I would load my shotgun and hop in.]

This is a lot bigger than guys who are already basically kind and decent learning to show a bit more empathy. This is a major rewrite of rules that have been so thoroughly woven into the fabric of our culture that they've been functionally invisible and have had us all by the balls.

Deeply rooted (both ancient and modern) aspects of our culture will have to be dismantled. They should have been torn down long ago and now the need is urgent. We cannot just hand this off to evolution—we have to slide over into the driver's seat and steer.

Bea's father, Howard, came to our town in search of greener pastures and ostensibly to rebuild his relationship with the daughter he had largely abandoned many years before, in what I vaguely understood as an extended plunge into the depths of alcohol following the death of Bea's mother. Bea didn't offer many details, and I didn't seek them.

[I don't know if I refrained from questions out of kindness or self-absorption—probably a bit of both. Whatever direct or indirect permission was needed to open her history, I certainly failed to give it.]

Howard was a skilled machinist and had no problem finding work. He was capable of charm and seemed truly intent on a new start with his life. Though the notion that an alcoholic can simply reinvent himself as a nonalcoholic by moving to a new town was transparently absurd, his sober charm was sufficiently polished to win a period of grace, until he hopped off the wagon again.

One evening after a typically stressful day as a welfare caseworker, I arrived at Bea's apartment to find her being viciously berated by her very intoxicated father. My instant reaction was distinctly undiplomatic.

[I have a childhood history that rendered me reflexively and savagely intolerant of belligerent drunks.]

I said, "I think you should shut your fucking mouth or I'll have to throw your sorry ass out of here."

"Who do think you are talking to me like that?"

"It doesn't matter who I think I am. What matters is what you can do about it."

"I guess I'll have to think about that."

"Do it some place else. Get the fuck out of here."

He left.

Bea and I made love on the kitchen floor.

[Our love was doomed.]

The road to a new social environment will be (unavoidably) paved with misunderstandings, misdirected anger, confusion, ambiguity, and sometimes injustice.

[Fasten your seatbelts; it's going to be a hell of a ride.]

One of the problems we face as patriarchal culture implodes is that it's relatively easy to incorporate arbitrary rules into a social structure, but what we have to do now is replace formulae with fluidity. There are no guidelines for that.

[You might call this cultural democracy.]

My wife was seventeen, and I was twenty-six, when we met. She was married. I was her caseworker. Our affair that took nearly four years to become a marriage began a little more than a year later (after I was no longer her caseworker) with an eagerly welcomed, impulsive kiss. One of the best, wisest things I ever did was to propose to a married woman in the shower.

[If human beings meeting in the confluence of love and desire are required to deny the delicious anarchy of the human heart, life will hose them hard. The alternative is to recognize the heroism of gentleness and embrace its risks.]

The conventionally religious tend to find great comfort in hierarchies and in codified restraints in speech and behavior supported by divine edict, despite complications like chronic guilt, war, and sexual frustration—it gives them a sense of order and meaning. When they encounter progressive ideas, they over-react (communism! perversion! the end times!) as if their very world is threatened. No one should be surprised by this.

[When you are knocked to the floor and kicked by your ranting, cursing father, it rearranges the molecular structure of your spirit.]

If a woman from my past spoke up about feeling threatened or intimidated, I would apologize—not as a tacit admission of conscious wrongdoing, but because I was part of a situation that caused discomfort. “I’m sorry,” is simply Civility 101. It is not noble, conciliatory, or politically correct. It is polite.

I find the more mundane and commonplace sins relatively easy to imagine. I can imaginatively put myself into the mindset of someone desperate enough to steal, fearful or embarrassed enough to lie, so enthralled with an attraction as to have a hidden affair, angry enough in a moment to lash out shamefully. But to me, rape is getting over into Jeffrey Dahmer territory—the realm of the unimaginable. I can’t enter into the mindset of someone who keeps human body parts in their refrigerator, and I can’t imagine the urge to rape.

[It baffles me.]

I taught an evening class in painting as an adjunct at a community college, mostly for the experience and because teaching was enormously satisfying, even after the inescapable loads of peripheral horseshit were factored in.

Around mid-semester, one of my nontraditional students asked to speak to me in private. The local police had gone to an apartment to arrest a man on a parole violation. He fled and was arrested after a high-speed chase. In the trunk of his car they found an extensive file of photographs of the student taken surreptitiously using a telephoto lens over a period of several months. To the best of her knowledge, she had never met the man. Even though he was in jail and likely would be for a while, she couldn’t be certain he had been working alone, and anyway, her sense of safety and security in the world had been shattered. I made sure that either I or a trustworthy fellow student escorted her to her car after each class for the balance of the semester.

[How many years did it take for her fear to subside?]

My father was both a fierce protector and a batterer. In his presence, I was safe from everything but his wrath and ridicule.

[Beloved animals met terrible fates in the confluence of paternal PTSD and maternal sociopathy.]

I carry parts of my father that are both admirable and poignantly defective. I have protective instincts that have served me well at times, but also tend to override other useful things like logic, reason, and civilized behavior. When someone I feel intuitively connected to suffers sudden misfortune, it feels to variable degrees like it’s my fault—as if I have failed somehow. It wasn’t something I did, rather something I didn’t do.

[That's the narrow defile in which chronic depression ambushes me. I know this and my ability to articulate it in both words and images lends a clarity that enables me to largely refuse the anger that bubbles up from the ground of my childhood.]

I don't think that kind of guilt is at all unusual among American, especially Appalachian, males. So when a torrent of "*me too*" stories washes over them sparking and crackling with cognitive dissonance, failure, and fear, a sensible, considered, at least partially honest response has a likelihood comparable to winning lottery tickets.

Over the course of twenty-one years (with a few wandering interludes) I was first a caseworker and then a casework supervisor for the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. I had made referrals that resulted in children being removed from households and placed in foster care due to abuse milder than what I had endured as a child, but I had never identified myself as having been an abused child. I have neither a neat clinical nor an insightfully poetic explanation for that. My observation from experience is that trauma often works that way.

After I finished my Master of Arts degree at age forty, my bother, Denny said he wanted to take me on a fishing trip as a graduation present. We drove to Pulaski, New York, checked into a motel, and met our guide before dawn the following morning over a high-cholesterol breakfast at a local diner.

We spent most of the day floating the Salmon River in a dory-like aluminum boat. The guide gave us advice on where to cast our surface plugs and controlled the action of the lures in the current by back paddling with the oars. The conversation was mostly light-hearted banter spiced with gentle irony and mellowed by a love of the river.

Ospreys and kingfishers worked the river ahead of us, in their own way. Soothed by sun, breeze, water, and birdsong into the mellow relaxation of work and indolence, we were alert and idle, as the well-fed wild should be. A day that began long ended short.

We drove into the highway night keenly feeling our brotherhood, the shared blood and history we had too long busily neglected. After lapsing briefly into the hypnotic rhythm of the road, Denny spoke.

"I had an ulterior motive when I invited you on this trip."

"Yeah, I had that feeling."

"We need to talk about what went on when we were growing up."

"It was pretty crazy."

"No, it was worse than that."

We talked each other through the dark realities of our father's rage, our mother's dishonesty and manipulation, and the shared violence our parents unleashed on our bodies, our selves, our lives, and our abilities to love, feel, and trust. He told me, with a frankness rendered bearable by darkness and driving, of his own struggle with crippled self-esteem, insidiously persistent fear of betrayal, and depression that had wrestled him to the brink of psychological disaster. The strength of his wife, his love, and his inner self had pulled him back from that terrible edge, and he realized that I too, had either been there or would surely find myself there in the future.

"Get counseling," he said. "You can't deal with this on your own and you *will* have to deal with this. Find a counselor you can connect with. Give it a chance, but if you don't feel a genuine rapport after three or four sessions, try someone else. But don't give up. Work it all the way out."

He saved my life.

[And now, men and women must save each other with the truth of their stories.]

Reg Darling lives in Vermont with his wife and cats. When he isn't writing, he paints and wanders in the woods. His essays have been published in Azure, The Chaos Journal, Dark Matter Journal, The Dr. T.J. Eckleburg Review, Hoot, River Teeth Journal, Timberline Review, Whitefish Review, and others.

Outside

by Rhea Dhanbhoora

The status of women across the globe and especially in countries like India oscillates between creeping towards equality and jumping several steps back to being increasingly hostile. This is a fragment from the narratives of women based in a largely ignored Zoroastrian/ Parsi community that's fast going the way of the Dodo Bird — an attempt to carve a little place in fiction for them to sit in, through stories that revolve around or set the characters in situations that are uncomfortable, taboo or in some other way lead to cracks and breaks for them, for society and for minority communities like them the world over.

*

All the other images fade, but for the orange flags. Stiff nylon, fighting lazily against a balmy breeze.

Orange. Always the strangest in the spectrum. A colour, a fruit, a flower — all rolled into one lazy word. As if there were no other way to describe the ghastly coalescence of red and yellow. A marriage of pigments, arranged quite conveniently between colours I have mixed feelings about. There was red, a reminder of period blood and bindis and rage and lipstick, muddled with yellow, a seemingly duplicitous shade that spits up images of Wordsworth's daffodils as quickly as it will Eliot's yellow fog.

I'm carded everywhere I go, and never with a smile when I'm alone. The world outside treats me differently than I'm treated at home, there's no garlands to celebrate the onset of womanhood, no smiles when I'm on my evening walk. Outside the safe confines of the colony, the women tuck belly fat back into their petticoats as they whisper about my painted face instead of gossiping about my alien boyfriends, the men brush past rudely instead of groaning about the loud music that kept them up at night. The world outside the colony suddenly feels more unfamiliar than it used to.

The surly man at the door of a club ten years past trendy wants to know why my bare arm is not linked in with that of a scraggly young man, bubbling over with the overconfidence typical of all those only recently released from the clutches of puberty. I don't want to explain where my scraggly young man is sulking tonight, so I simply nod to the acquaintances at the end of the room. He doesn't care how old I am.

My body moves laboriously past the dance-floor, squinting to find the edges of the room through a mess of sequinned skirts and skyscraper heels, the women around me teetering on pointe. The women in more acceptable outfits wait outside to judge. My chic, slim jeans a pale comparison to tight leather skirts and skater dresses. Still, I can feel eyes dipping into the space between the cowl neck of my blood red blouse.

They can't help it if they're taller than I am. It's not their fault my breasts are just below their line of vision. Straphangers by day, struggling to squeeze themselves into every last remaining inch of the sweaty buses and rumbling trains, revellers at night, waiting to squeeze themselves into someone's contact list. You can tell who's here alone.

A night alone seemed like a better idea five years ago in my unsung archipelago; seven little pieces moulded into the big, bad city. Another one of those arranged marriages.

Images of the big little island city float through my mind in little vignettes through the night. Short stories playing out in black and white, then suddenly switching to colour whenever the

characters get too close to my bar stool. The lever is broken, and I'm being dipped gently towards the floor. The rest of the stools sit comfortably higher than mine. I'm not even surprised.

Bombay, I call it. Traitorous word these days, but the best way to help it feel like home. Such a heady mix. All of us trying to keep our names scribbled in its sand. There's the pretty young thing from the big building that flirts with the seaface, on her sixth drink. The coolboy from the outskirts who has to travel two hours to get to work every morning, nursing the one drink he can afford. The gaggle from the North, begging for a Bollywood tune. The preppy millionaire from the South in his red trousers and crisp

white shirt with a wad of cash in his pocket, bumming cigarettes off everyone else, pumping his fist to Friday night hip-hop. The boisterous colony boy, belting out Freddy Mercury.

A hand slips up my thigh. Warm and firm, but my skin shivers beneath it, a chill seeping into my bones. I knew when he sidled into a seat next to me. It's easy to weed out the depraved. Harder to scoot away quick enough. It's my fault for being alone. Just for a little music, a comforting drink, a break from the confines of a house too cramped for the six of us. A breather from text message fights and badgering boyfriends. No. There's no excuse. Peace of mind is for the strong, the wise, the virile. I am the weaker sex.

Besides, he's no stranger, he's introducing himself. Just a little too much to drink. Stop being such a prissy.

They're waving me over to come dance. I consider it for a second. It's a tempting idea. I think of the wave of disco lights that will blind me, the lousy music that will force me into a blurred stupor.

Dazed and confused — the perfect weekend. My phone purrs against my thigh. Time for another round. I can already hear the shrill cries of manly discontent. I've taken too long to answer.

The back door leads to smokers' paradise. Free from the judgement of families rolling by the front door on a busy Friday night.

Fresh air. A mistake to breathe in deeply, I'm choking on the familiar, stale stench of smog and ash.

The cigarette crackles, a sliver of a stick, barely visible in the thick smog.

My tears are angry tears, but I get a sympathetic smile from the woman smoking in the shadows in front of me, before she slips past and back inside. Two more visitors, a shared lighter, a casual conversation. One last cigarette before I'm ready to rumble. I can hear the door crack open again as I disconnect. Everyone seems to have found the easier way out.

The top of his head shimmers menacingly as he hovers by the door, as if even the hair had known better than to stay put. He doesn't approach, but the bulk of his frame blocks the little light I'd been watching, falling in patterns on the hard concrete in front of me.

I know this is not a friendly cigarette encounter, even as I nonchalantly bring the stick up to my lips for a deep drag.

Animals can smell fear.

The paper crackles and the smoke sputters out of my mouth, confidently sheathing my fingers, now beginning to tremble in the darkness. I inch closer to the door, pretending to be more invested in the act of smoking than anyone should ever be. Terrible habit. This would be my fault too.

He knows I can't make it past him. His hand flies up to my face, the smell of weed rising up from the cracks in his palms, his freshly cut fingernails digging into the sides of my cheeks as one finger pushes itself, unwelcome, into my mouth.

His unshapely body is pressing me to the wall, little bits of blubber pressing into my legs to pin me there as they turn to jelly.

I want to scream.

I am screaming.

My voice box has shut down. My legs have shut down.

I'm pushing my body up as hard as I can. But I am the weaker sex.

His teeth flash in the dark. He's happy with himself.

I avert my eyes. Don't stare into a crocodile's jaws, I was taught.

Make it as hard as you can.

It doesn't matter, as little bits of my skin are suddenly subject to an onslaught of scraggly beard and the sticky saliva of an over-eager tongue. Greedy, impatient. I can't even tell how my body is being pinned down, what parts of his body are overpowering all of mine.

It's getting darker, bile rises up in my throat. Hot and sticky, like his mouth, currently on my breasts. I don't know when or how his trousers unzipped. I can't tell how my knees are suddenly thudding to the floor, or with what strength I'm trying to pull my head back as he pushes it forward.

He's saying something, but I'm deaf now.
Everything is as red as my blouse, hanging limply from my waist. I know it's all over when my trousers find their way around my ankles.
It's her own fault, they'll say.
Sharp pain pierces my stomach. He's moving awkwardly, incorrectly.
Is it his first time?
Headlights round the corner, the door cracks open, he's gone. I sit, letting the hard concrete bruise my bare thighs, adjusting my cowl neck as I hear the click of a lighter and a tinkle of laughter. I'm too small now, to be seen from the shadows.
The sky is a pretty pink, the sort that comes after the clearing of a purple haze of factory smoke and sputtering smog let loose from taxis past their prime. A balmy breeze coils over the promenade, wafting over to dry the sticky saliva off my shoulders and neck. My cigarette crackles against a phantasmagoria of disapproving men and women, my swollen eyes settling on a vision of the Sabine women, staring down at me from the dilapidated fort on the edge of the sea.
A group of men walk past, brandishing their saffron flags as they stare me down. I have no business being here.
A stray ripple tickles my toes. Just a hint of a wave before dawn. A spot of red trickles down my scraped knee into the murky yellow water. I'm missing a button on my chic, slim jeans.
The sea looks magnificent. The waves are picking up steam as the wind begins to huff and puff over the breathtaking expanse of the water. The frothy white fringes tease the rocks I'm perched on, splashing over them onto little flecks of sand, then drawing back in a hurry.
It's quiet in the morning. The wide stretches of concrete twist and turn around the periphery of the water, separated only by a poorly paved promenade and a row of tall trees, swinging in the distance.
A flutter of wings and one of the supposedly extinct sparrow family flits past. A tiny feathered friend reminding me that the weak don't always succumb.
My island city.
Risky at night, resplendent at dawn.
I walk quickly towards the safe confines of the colony, back to the big rusty gates, taking in the pretty sights of a city still in slumber, marred only by the hostile orange flags still waving me on.

Rhea Dhanbhoora is a Fiction candidate at Sarah Lawrence who recently went back to full-time study after a seven-year stint in print and digital media. Back home in Bombay, her full-time job as an Editor included handling and writing for Features supplements for a daily newspaper and as a teenager, had a collection of what some people may call poetry published. Not counting a brief spell selling homemade cakes, cookies, and 3D sugar figures, she's worked for health portals, travel websites, a short film company, literary reviews, hotel chains, and India's first podcast network. She's currently working on narratives of women based in a largely ignored Zoroastrian/ Parsi community that's fast going the way of the Dodo Bird — an attempt to carve a little place in fiction for them to sit in, through short stories that revolve around or set the characters in situations that are uncomfortable, taboo or in some other way lead to cracks and breaks for them, for society and for minority communities like them the world over.

Wakeweaver

by Leah Baker

I close my eyes to weave.

Darkness -- then the blackness begins to vibrate. Slowly, streams of muted jewel tones start to spread out from the center of my mind's eye. They arch outward in waves of subdued color -- eggshell, mauve, marine. The colors grow more vibrant as minutes pass. Outside of the dream, I place my hands instinctively on my ribcage, attempting to smooth the rapid beat of my heart and slow my rapid breaths. I run my fingers back and forth across my sternum and belly, soothing my organs now flooded with adrenaline.

My vision goes to black again. Inside the dream, I step forward, placing foot in front of foot onto the matte onyx glass beneath me. I have seen all this before; it is common for those who weave. My leather shoes are soft and soundless against the smooth path of empty darkness. And then, a small figure appears on the ground in the distance and I glide towards it.

A deer head.

I know it is him because I have seen this shape before. It dropped into its final rest on a miniature bed of moss, lush and verdant. A snake moves soundlessly through one eyehole, while smoke drifts upward from the other. Beneath, extinguished ash. Now, a tremble on the ground below. A tendril emerges from the soil, shaking -- a sprouting fern. Up, it crawls and unfurls. His decomposition has made the earth here rich. Flowers shoot up and bloom: thistle, marigold, nettle. The image is sweet enough to pluck, picturesque enough to etch with needles and ink on one's skin.

I settle on this picture, unmoving, grasping for its meaning. Is he dead? Is my part with him finally finished? Without warning, a choke seizes my throat, my eyes fill with water and I am suddenly sobbing with relief. Saltwater pours from my eyes and I can feel it wetting my throat, my wool collar.

When my eyes open, I am seated beneath a tall cedar in a ring of other trees. Beneath each is seated a weaver, legs crossed, eyes closed. Some have a book beside them, a blanket folded around them. Others have come with nothing, sitting with straight spines and their hands placed in empty laps.

They have come here to enter the dream, the liminal space between the spirit world and ours, where we go to ask for images of guidance. In our country, this is a practice done only by those who choose. It is not for everyone, but those who do it are bound in unspoken vows to one another to hold this sacred lineage and support fellow weavers.

I swallow, realizing my parched throat and reaching for my flask of water. I usually give myself the better part of the hour to settle in, breathe, and reflect before leaving -- but this time, my exit is immediate.

Nearing the outside of the ring, I approach the archway at the exit, beside which there is a woman seated under a canopy of ash trees. I look into her grey eyes and she nods, handing me a letter. A rust-colored orange is painted in the corner of the envelope, and I open it knowing already which handwriting I will see inside.

"I dreamed you shot me with arrows," he has written. I fold the letter and place it back into the envelope, closing my eyes. That he had the backbone to write me is incomprehensible. I forbade him from contacting me years ago, but he continues to insert himself to maintain his influence over me.

As I make my exit from the place of weaving, I pass a ranger on my left, meant to guard the weavers. He nods at me as I pass, the only movement apart from his standstill. I recognize him vaguely, as my hunting outfit has been contracted by the ranger force before.

Tracing through backroads, I make it back to my quarters. I yank open the doors and immediately peel my soft layers off, then pull woolen clothes over my undergarments -- green for hunting. A simple brown jerkin goes over my bodice, bracers on my forearms, hardy socks, and the same soft leather shoes as earlier. After pulling a hood up over my ears and forehead, I clasp my hands around my bow and run.

My feet graze moss and stone as I navigate the jagged landscape of these woods. I know where I'll find him because I know what part of the woods his hunting outfit frequents. As I dance across the landscape, I remember the words he spoke to me after the first time I tried to push him away.

"Come, wounded doe. You will be safe here."

Deer imagery, even then. It's strange how these things follow us, emerging and resurfacing even as time passes. My feet land one after the other more quickly. Safe? I was anything but safe with him.

A figure moves in and out of my sightline in the distance. I see him. He jaunts forward and his dark form is flashing in between the trees. His long legs carry him swiftly as he saunters around each trunk, brushing his slim fingers across bark, lichen, moss. He slows, sensing something, but only barely.

My fingers grip the handle of the bow, pulling the wooden curve toward my cheek. Breath escapes my lips and fills the narrow space that is the belly of the bow, a sheen of light passing through it as though electric. I feel the purple vibrancy of the fletching as I reach back, its soft sharp edge grazing against my fingers as I pull it forward and set the arrow into place. My hold is steady on the nock, fingers placed on either side of its notched sides.

I make no sound, but his face turns toward my direction. I hear his voice reach me from across the glade. "Come, wounded doe. What is this about?"

I close my eyes and hear my voice as loud as a shout. Whether it's my inner or outer voice, I can't distinguish. It is firm, and carries none of the shy, conciliatory tones that I used to use with him. All hesitation has vanished.

"Wake up."

He moves slightly, shifting from one foot to the other. "I am awake. What are you--"

Crack! sounds the first arrow.

My voice in my ears again. Mine. "Stop enacting the same pattern with vulnerable women!"

I squint and I can see his face writhing. His upper arm is hit. "I knew when I'd ultimately have to witness you doing to other women what you did to me -- using your authority to pose as safe, trustworthy and nurturing, then dismissing us through manipulation, exhaustion, and gaslighting. You trained us to trust you and we did! Your tribe shakes its head at you though it won't open its mouth except to me. Now I open my mouth to you on behalf of all of us!"

I watch him as his feet stutter forward, and then his body slumps toward the ground. He's on one knee, one arm grasping toward the arrow in his skin.

"Rise, man, rise!"

Rapid silence fills the space between us, a screeching depth of blank air vibrating with the force of my ferocity.

"We are waiting for you to rise!"

Slowly, he gets up, stumbling as he turns, and begins to take steps in the other direction. He jogs forward, zig zagging, a thin streak of blood moving its way down his arm.

"We?" he stutters.

My eyes dart around the glade, and the figures of my fellow weavers appear behind me faintly in my sight radius, just as I knew they would. They are cloaked and silent, forming a wall to back me.

I turn back to face him, emboldened by the support the weavers have offered me by way of their appearance. I steady myself, grasp another arrow, and set it, pulling back my arm.

"What you did was psychological abuse!"

I let go. The arrow whirrs forward and cracks, splitting in two. Looking ahead, I see his body separate, becoming two forms. The two arrows blast forward and *thock!* simultaneously hit both bodies.

"When I called upon you in moments where I needed support, you grew angry, cruel, and blaming. You told me I was crazy as you grew crazier. You laughed at the idea of consent when you *knew* I had been hurt by him!"

He turns and looks at the figure next to him: a balding, older man, a smattering of age spots across his face. They are each nearly mirrors of the other except for the age: both of them lanky and deceptively imposing: towering, but ultimately slight.

The balding man smiles a grimacing smile at his near-twin, the arrows that hit them lodged securely at their navels, pools of blood forming around the wounds. The older one reaches for the younger, bony fingers outstretched, rubbing the shoulder of the other -- then letting his hand fall to touch his crotch.

It the opening scene from what he did to me.

The younger twin jerks away, then slumps over helplessly. "Hey, man! What are you doing?" The other one laughs, his mouth writhing and ghoulish, his face shimmering green like a hologram.

I'm standing my distance in the grove, smiling darkly at the irony of the scenario. When I was violated, he urged me to grow stronger, to protect myself. I could do that. I did do that. I am a warrior, after all. But I also needed him to stand up for me. I needed someone untouched to go after the balding man. Instead, I dissociated -- denying my hurt, stuffing it away.

I prickle and adjust my bracers as if to guard myself from this familiar display. Both men are now heaped on the ground, lying nearly huddled.

My senses are turned to full volume. I inhale sharply the vibrancy of the crisp air, eye the verdant leaves surrounding me. The frost resembles a crystalline substance hanging like strings of diamonds from the branches. The figures of my fellow weavers step forward, forming a closer and more solidified rank. I glimpse the rubied rust of fungus nearby my feet, sense the network of mycelium beneath me, connecting me vibrationally to the weavers behind me. Everything becomes clear.

In a reality I could never enact in another place, I aim decisively to end the madness. No other sister will experience what I have, falling under the spell of these men who call themselves "safe." I raise my bow, reach back for an arrow, steady my stance.

"Hold, woman!"

A ranger appears at my left, a hundred yards away on a mound of decomposing forest debris, just beyond the weavers in file.

"Hold!"

His keen voice echoes and everything stills.

"You have not been authorized to hunt this soldier! He has not stood trial!"

I laugh, raising my bow to position. I hear the clamor of a team of rangers racing to join their captain, their husky voices shouting directions as they approach.

I look to the heap ahead of me, the two bodies. I can already see their bones, and superimposed onto these, my vision weaves an image of peonies, columbine, and mugwort sprouting from the eyes.

Ranger, ranger tries to shoot.

No, I shoot the last arrow.

Leah teaches writing at a public high school, and has had her most recent pieces published or forthcoming in *The Bookends Review*, *Lit Tapes*, *Thrice Publishing*, *Panoplyzine*, and *Twyckenham Notes*. She is a fierce feminist, proponent of the consent movement, and advocate for creating more inclusive spaces. Leah resides in Portland, Oregon.

[untitled]
by Emily Hagerty

i.

i asked,
can the memories ever change subjects?
i remember the day in elementary school we learned the word “motif” with the example of georgia
o’keefe’s paintings

she said yes, my
mouth runs dry, the words are thirsty stones.

at first, they were about what happened, exactly, in detail my mind and body had never expressed before,

and then they were about violence itself; random acts, senseless destruction,

lastly, they grew into you;

the boy in the hospital waiting room, and you were hurt
too.

you were one of the snowboarders they brought in that day
(i remember overhearing that there had been a lot of accidents on the slopes)
you and your ski bum friends with broken arms and fractured legs
sat there in a row, defeated, numb hands fumbling for their phones to call their
somebody to pick them up and take them home, or maybe to that dive bar on church st

i see you there, slouched and aching, an aura formed
where your beanie and helmet rubbed together to create the red-mark halo around your sweet forehead

and lastly, you were the pill they gave me when
i couldn’t have another person touch that throbbing, bleeding, confused place

i had never witnessed or believed completely
in transubstantiation before you became
the holy medical communion wafer, passed through the river styx
of my mouth and calmed my rabbit pulse,

now
i come home to you,
holding me in the haze of morning, in the cool night,
knowing you have always
always
been with me

ii

some days i still feel like the girl in the hospital.
rorschach blood on my legs,
and mind buzzing numb unaware of the name of what happened—

but now i know what i'd tell the nurse;

i comfort myself with the feeling of false closure,

a retroactive redemption of wasted hours
consumed with questions asked too

late

and dreams of prophets unable to fully speak

their visions, the weight of ashes
too heavy on their tongue

iii

a healer told me once they saw a sprawling green space in my heart
that it is

“overflowing, vibrant, and alive”

on the days when we feel too intertwined with the darkness,
we must remind ourselves,
that we,

both in nature and identity,

are blooming.

Emily lives in Chicago with her partner. She originally wrote "untitled," the first piece she's written about her trauma, for Resilience's annual "Breaking the Silence" Open Mic event. Along with her love of poetry and art, Emily has an affinity for dogs named after food—all thanks to a bulldog named Jellybean.

The Same Story

by Sarabrisi Kaur

There are years and years
I spent in recovering, holding
and finding if there
was anything left to
be the being.
You know:
rape, abuse, divorce
are not the known, discussed
names of the other common most
silently killing diseases
of the heart, soul and life.
So, there were years and years
I sat through the chair
and the therapist's process,
she asked-I talked,
she followed-I ran,
she held-I let loose,
she offered words, support and praise,
I discovered efforts to procrastinate, suffer and be pained.
It seemed an endless war of the past
in the present.
Some days,
I remember ordering piles of titles:
poetry, art, philosophy, history,
sexuality, healing and what not.
I wanted to fix the crushed me,
I wanted to hold and dry out,
not feel, not talk,
not open, not share,
it was a determined script
of
diminishing the rush.
The past was shameful.
I was abominable,
I believed.

Shame and inadequacy
was all that I had
after losing the self
into the cesspool of
what I had loved the utmost.
So, for years and years
I had just me-the dissipated,
compressed and stolen me,
And I read myself all the stories,
searching the websites of
self-help and motivation glories.

I hung my heart,
I knew it was all not there,
for what I searched
was just,
my perpetual pain,
there were matches and
there were mis-matches,
there was no end ever,
of suffering, cycling and recasting.
Every story I closed on,
percolated more of hidden me,
more of saddened me,
more of lost, afflicted me.
Though, things do change,
life does flow,
time is not still forever,
I too,
let the time eat me up,
allowed the hurt to be there like a soft jam,
for it did belong to me as ever,
the only change I commanded
was I stopped commanding myself
on me anymore.
I just decided to
wear the shame and hurt
not secretly anymore.
I spoke disconcerted,

I troubled people
hearing me,
I spoke irreverent and slow.
Sometimes,
I grew quiet and
sometimes I
mumbled,
extended my shadows
like my internal spine.
I processed, broke,
skinned on their privileged
mahogany tables.
I refused to lie
and for the first time
in years and years:
I felt freer in my breath
and womb.

I spoke and started saying-
what I survived

and what it took.

Some shook and
said-ah, past is past,
you are a courageous woman
don't drag it around,
look for the future
and stop being in the past.
As if that was the easiest
one and they had just solved.
Past is past,
time is time,
you are you,
they told and retold.
I dared not stop,
talking
like a dying goat,
a surviving ghost.
My words drew my
expressions,
I tore and cooked

all that I had worn.
I left people
more upset
by sharing my story
than how I let the
story dance and grow.
I remember
leaving more people
complaining,
why stick to the past,
the detailed partaking and suffering.
Time and again,
they warned and said:
Don't talk ,don't talk,
as if they meant to save me from me,
as if by talking
I would unravel my role in their own conditioned story making,
as if by listening,
they had to protest against all that I lived through,
as if my words called them to some action
and they just excused bizarre.
Some went the other way,
they exempted, excused,
some asked explicit details,
a doctor said -where was your mother,
when he took you at night
and how do I believe that what you say now is right,
there is definitely some missing sight.
His face shone like the morning wet grass,
I thought if he had committed such assault.

Some said, oh, this is just so common,
we all had it through
with our cousins, friends and uncles dear.
What is the point to talk
after years and years,
when it is almost inhumed and
gone,
what is the point to
smear the name,

the family, the house,
and think now you are a mother too.
I felt like a thief,
guillotined at times.
I confess how
shameful and guilty
I stood
by saying that
I lived the pain,
it had never died.
So, for years and years
my life was nothing
but a painted, decanted
lie in my and their eye.
I felt unreal
and fake
as I stood
naked and plain.
It took another bunch
of years and years
to understand
that you speak for
yourself,
you do not speak
to be heard and understood,
to birth agreement and accepted,
you speak for you
can tell,
you speak for you
can't hold
anymore
and your speech
is your only
weapon
they fear the real most.
The tricks, shames, abuses hurled,
silent faces, contorted lips,
are all nothing but the
harvest of the hidden-

the silent signification of our wounded protest.
It's okay, it's okay, I tell myself
and with no more of lengthy narrations
I sip my tea and hug,
it has not been easy to be here and now.
So, it has taken years and years,
I will tell you more of this another time
for now it doesn't matter
how long it took
and how it took,
I foster and sustain,
this presence, this truth,
this shakiness, this resolve that trembles,
as I forgive some of the people and the past sometimes,
I weave and dance,
and sometimes I know how my inability to forgive is not a failure too,
for it can't be offered on the plate as and when asked to do.
The molten parts,
verb through my body, pain and hurt.
I hungrily embrace myself
over sleepovers and talks,
I feel my parts, mouths
and pausingly feed myself.
Sometimes, just a cup of lemon tea and sitting in the balcony
with clouds
is enough
and sometimes I pack and travel to the mountains and lakes.
I do what I need to do.
I realize, I am not a single color, piece and flavour.
I am broken, flawed and repaired.
I am one in many parts and pieces,
eccentricities and wise speeches,
I am not divided by any number,
I am alive in whatever happened to me,
I am alive in the multitudes of faces, tongues and mouths in me.
I am alive in the circles, twists, straight lines of pain, healing and people,
I am alive in what is present
and also what is absent in me.

Sarabsri is a mother, poetess, traveller, survivor, animal rescuer and a full time Mindfulness facilitator in Pune, India. She is working on her research project studying Mindful Presence in the poetry of Indian Spiritual poets. She left her job as a college lecturer in English Literature to follow her passion to see education more inclusive, resilient to the social-emotional growth. Today, she runs customized trainings exploring poetry, art and life stories to question conditioned biases of caste, color, gender, motherhood in the South Asian society.

Please listen to Sarabsri perform “The Same Story” on Awakened Voices’ website.

My Brother Got Battered, But We're Not Supposed To Talk About It

By Laura Maria Grierson

My brother got battered in the back garden,
but we're not supposed to talk about that.
He got jumped in the garden by a lad he knew,
and afterwards his friends couldn't understand why
he just wanted to stay in and didn't feel like going out
into town, even after he explained
what had happened. He said
he didn't feel like himself, and this
friend said, Well,
you *are* you, so just be normal. It'll
take your mind off it.
My brother didn't like his friends much after that.
He didn't leave the house for two weeks; he just moved
from the bedroom to the living room and ate crisps and
gained some weight. He didn't want to talk to anyone, but he didn't want
to not talk about it either.

Then he told someone, and she joked,
Joked,
I'd never want to play sport with you,
in case you said after that I
battered you.
And my brother didn't know
what to say, so
he didn't say anything.

There was a court date, and then another
because the first was delayed, then the trial.
Everyone told him it was OK
if he cried, because if he did it would be showing emotion
and the jury would be more sympathetic, and he knew
he should cry
because he'd seen it on television that victims cry, and that
was how everyone knew they were really upset and had to be telling the truth,
only when it came down to it he didn't cry
when he was on the stand, and the longer the jury deliberated
the more he felt he'd let himself down by not crying,
but in the end the guy was found guilty anyway.
The guy served six months of a two-year sentence,
since the remand counted
as time served, and while that was happening
my brother graduated and
he got a new girlfriend
and wasn't just a boy that got his head kicked in. Then
he decided to tell his girlfriend, since
he didn't think there should be a secret like that
between them, and the girlfriend said,

So,
why were you on your own with him?
And my brother said that he'd known this lad
for years, they'd worked together
in the factory, and his girlfriend said,
You can't trust anyone. You shouldn't have
put yourself
in that position.
After that, my brother didn't want to talk about it anymore.

When the guy got out
on license, there were posts on Facebook about it, and friends
of my brothers, the real friends, shared them,
which was good, I thought, because if everyone knew
that he was the sort of man
that battered people
then perhaps no one would hire him and he'd
have to leave the area. Most of the comments people left vilified that
batterer of boys,
but one lad wrote,
What about silly little boys that lose at football and then cry "attacked" after?

But my brother hadn't been
playing football. He'd only been wearing
his football kit, which boys are always warned against because of
the violence it can incite in others,
but they hadn't played,
there hadn't even been talk of it. And
even if they had,
once the lad started battering him
it wasn't a game of football anymore.

My brother wanted to tell them how it had been,
but he didn't want to talk about it.
He wanted to play them the recording of his 999 call, but
then people would hear it. He could show them
photos of his beaten face, but then they would know it, and it wouldn't be
my brother's face anymore, it'd be the face of the boy
who got his head kicked in. He wanted to show them
his scars, but then people would know he still carried them. He wanted
them to see the blood on the grass, but he didn't think he should
have to prove himself a victim just to prove
he wasn't a liar.

Laura Maria Grierson is an editorial assistant at Stirling Publishing (Edinburgh) and a freelance writer for House of Content (Teesside). Three of her poems were previously published in Teesside Literary Society

Inaugural Anthology (2016), and her short stories, 'At the Stroke' and 'Green Pastures' were recently published in 'The Ghastling Volume 6' and 'Dark Lane Anthology Volume 6' respectively. She is also working on her first novel, which explores the after-effects of sexual abuse and trauma.

That Night
by Duane L. Herrmann

He was on top of me,
twice my age,
twice my weight,
and now –
with no underwear,
as I was too,
remove for massage, he'd said.
Isolated farm boy,
socially inept,
what did I know
of intent?
He, an acquaintance,
far from home,
stopped for the night,
mounted me
and asked for lube.
I froze, paralyzed:
What? What? WHAT?
The handle of a shovel,
hoe, or garden rake
entered me:
OH, GOD!
It HURTS! It HURTS!!
He finished, kissed my back,
returned to his bed.
Next morning...
I still felt him inside.

To Be Safe
by Duane L. Herrmann

To be safe,
when I am out,
I sit
back to the wall
with eyes
on the doors.
I need to know
who is coming
before
they are here.
Others
don't understand,
"Weird," they say.
I don't care.
I need to feel safe,
and
when I'm not home
that's the only way.

Duane L. Herrmann, is a survivor who lived to tell, and loves the pure light of the moon - and trees. He creates from his knowledge and experience. His collections of poetry include: Ichnographical:173, Prairies of Possibilities, and Praise the King of Glory. Individual work is published in Midwest Quarterly, Little Balkans Review, Flint Hills Quarterly, Orison, Inscape and others in print and online in the US and elsewhere, in English and other languages. He received the Robert Hayden Poetry Fellowship, the Ferguson Kansas History Book Award and nominated to be Poet Laureate of Kansas.

Little Bird
by Marcela Rodriguez-Campo

Most days, I am afraid of the dark.
I close my eyes tight and without fail
I find you there, patiently waiting.
Teeth seething, tiny lungs heaving,
Child witness to a man turned wolf—
But that was the allure.
You sensed my innocence,
Yearned for sweetness
To drown yourself in.
I wish I could ask you:
What left you so thirsty?
Who emptied you?
Left your rib cage aching with hunger
Searching for things to fill yourself with?
So greedy that you thought
Digging into the thighs of a child
Could somehow bring you comfort?
I remember how your eyes glimmered
When you woke me with your breathing,
I was a frightened little bird,
In the mouth of a wolf.
I remember blinking and then screaming,
Running and then crawling
For the door of my room.
You hoped that I would collapse into myself,
That my voice box would fall
Over the cliff of my throat,
But instead it sprouted wings,
Found song in this suffering,
Saw poetry in the surviving.
I am still afraid of the dark,
But when I close my eyes
And I find you there
I squeeze my eyes tight
To push you out of all the places
You do not belong.

I imagine clearing my mind,
An untouched canvas
Where I can paint over the wounds.
With the swipe of my brush
I can give myself wings.
Smother my soul
In soft yellows and golds,
Smear the insecurity
With loud oranges and reds,
And carefully dip each feather

In my purples and blues.
Wings so large and strong
That this little bird is no longer afraid of you.
I finish, stand back, and stare,
At the masterpiece I am becoming,
In spite of you.

Marcela Rodriguez-Campo is a first generation Colombian immigrant and a second year PhD student in Multicultural Education. She has previously had her work featured in Huizache, Latinx Spaces, and Medium.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

If you are interested in submitting your work to *Awakened Voices*, please view our submission guidelines at <http://www.awakeningsart.org/awakened-voices-submission-guidelines/>.

We accept writing of all genres, but for this issue we are especially excited about encouraging submissions of: flash fiction, fiction, vignette, and graphic novel.

The theme for our Spring 2019 issue will be: **Those Who Help**

Tell us what helping a survivor looks like. Show us in a story, in a character, in an homage, what does help look like? Can others give help? Can you receive help that is offered to you? What do you wish had been your story or the story of someone you love? Have you failed in trying to help someone? Has someone helped you learn about advocacy and being a good ally? Show us.

Submissions responding to the theme are encouraged, but not required.

We are welcoming the writers and readers of *Awakened Voices* to submit to the new *Awakened Voices* blog, *The Nightingale*.

Awakenings

Awakenings is the parent organization of Awakened Voices. Awakenings exists to make visible the artistic expression of survivors of sexual violence. By showcasing stories of survival, we are helping survivors find peace while simultaneously challenging the cultural taboos that prevent an honest discussion of sexual violence.

Awakenings is a certified 501-c3 organization with a small art gallery space in Chicago, IL. We hold a wide variety of year-round programming that includes rotating art exhibits, monthly art making nights, musical concerts, dance and theater performances, poetry readings and open mic nights, live painting events, and much more. We also publish an online literary magazine twice a year, and hold writing workshops to help survivors heal through literary arts. We partner with rape crisis centers, counselors, art therapists, local activists, and like-minded nonprofits to collaborate on events and share our audiences. We are growing rapidly and want to spread the word, expand our community, and widen the resources we are able to offer survivors.

We shine a light on the truth. We are upfront and dead center about the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse in our culture. We are here to tell the truth and share the stories of the survivors who want tell them.