

ISSUE 8  
**THOSE WHO HELP**  
April 2019

**AWAKENED VOICES**  
LITERARY MAGAZINE



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

About Awakenings and Awakened Voices... (3)  
Letter from The Editor... (4)  
Content Warning... (5)  
Meet Our Reviewers... (90)

### **May I Help You?**

by Rev. Dr. Barbara Edema... (6)

### **For Her**

by Rev. Dr. Barbara Edema... (7)

### **Asking For Help**

by Doni Shepard... (9)

### **Healing**

by Serafina Valenzuela... (10)

### **THE BEST IN THE WORLD**

by Rebecca Redshaw... (11)

### **Where There's Quiet**

by I. Grey... (14)

### **Kamilah**

by Chloe Allred... (17)

### **A Shame Not Ours to Hold**

by Tracy Haught... (19)

### **All The Little Wasted Things**

by Jason Kaufman... (27)

### **Ask The Why**

by Grace Kathleen Snyder... (29)

### **Andromeda**

by Michael Russell... (30)

### **Bad Reputation**

by Sugar Lafever... (33)

### **Don't Give Them the Satisfaction and**

### **Other Lies**

by Angela Mackintosh... (36)

### **Gabriela**

by Chloe Allred... (41)

### **In Reflection**

by Chloe J. Kander... (43)

### **Guest Educator**

by Cathy Warner... (52)

### **The Prisoner's Love Song**

by Julia C. Spring... (55)

### **a letter to myself, to read each morning**

by Hope D. Weidemann... (61)

### **Cleanse Away the Dirt**

by Melissa Kelly... (63)

### **you (me, us)**

by Eddy Funkhouser... (64)

### **swamp monster**

by Eddy Funkhouser... (66)

### **Jane Doe 1**

by Jacqueline M. Regan... (69)

### **You too?**

by Anne White... (73)

### **Stephanie**

by Chloe Allred... (76)

### **The Green-Tiled Bathroom**

by Jeremy Gadd... (78)

### **On Your Knees**

by Caroline Eliz... (79)

### **The Aftermath**

by Hope D. Weidemann... (81)

### **mapping**

by Doni Shepard... (85)

### **Let Me**

by Judson Easton Packard... (88)

### **Mid-fall**

by Clara Fourcade... (89)



## **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.

## **Awakened Voices**

*Awakened Voices* is the literary branch of Awakenings and came into existence in 2015. At *Awakened Voices* we focus each issue around a guiding theme. 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.

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.

*Awakened Voices* has grown substantially in 2019. The additional reviewers and editors make the behind-the-scenes process much smoother, sustainable, and joyful. Their impact is huge!

Readers and writers, may you find healing, of 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.

## Letter from the Editor

We asked writers to show us what it looks like to help a survivor, to be helped as a survivor, and what it looks like when someone cannot help or chooses not to help. We received many submissions that broke our hearts and many that warmed them. Our hope is for you to feel warmed by the renewing energy that flows through Rev. Dr. Barbara Edema's pieces as she lifts her readers up. Our hope is for you to be transported through Michael Russell's storytelling of an alternate reality. Our hope is that you, too, find help in these pages and learn what it might mean to help a survivor.

For the first time, *Awakened Voices* contains a content warning. This serves as a flag to readers of potentially sensitive material *so that readers may prepare themselves*. Like a swim instructor prepares a class to swim with kickboards, fins, and a quick word about the water being a bit chilly at first, so we attempt to prepare our readers to read about sexual violence and the conversation around rape culture.

Dear Reader, we hope you dive in, wade in, or sit on the edge with your toes dipped in. We're all finding our way through this many-layered conversation. It's okay to pause when you need to. It's also okay to feel like someone finally knows, finally gets what you've been living and to read straight on through.

May we all find ways to heal, to help each other, and to choose to write bravely and creatively for ourselves and our community.

Thank you for reading the stories of survivors, allies, and advocates of sexual violence.

See you in the pool.

Jeri

## **Content Warning**

The following writing contains material including one or more of the following:  
Rape and Sexual Assault, Abuse, Self-Injurious Behavior, Suicide.

**May I Help You?**  
by Rev. Dr. Barbara Edema

**May I Help You?**

Some may have suggestions.

Even if you didn't ask.

Some may say you must be strong! You must be fierce! You must fight! You are tough!

But you didn't ask.

They don't know you have fought far too long. You are tired of wars.

Some may say, "Forget your sad story and move on with your life."

Nope, you didn't ask. Some people need to believe they know all the answers even when they know nothing about you.

Some people talk so they don't have to listen.

Some may ignore you. This can hurt. But it is their own insecurity. Perhaps their own immaturity. This is not a reflection on you. You are beautiful. They are uncomfortable.

**So, may I help you?**

Take your time.

I might not have any answers. I probably won't.

Personally, every survivor has their own distinct horror story. I respect you and your story.

Would you like to talk about it?

Is it easier to whisper? Or shout? Or let your tears do the talking?

What would comfort you?

You may ask for what you need. Always.

You may tip-toe or stomp or curl up on the couch.

Your answers are the right answers. Take all the time you need.

If you need to fight, I'll go to war with you.

For now, I'll sit with you. I'll make the tea. I'll be present. I will listen.

**May I help you, dear one?**

**For Her**  
**by Rev. Dr. Barbara Edema**

When I can tell my story without tear or ache,  
In prose that ceases my heart to break,  
Is it not my road to trod,  
To find the one who has lost her God?

I see her beneath the waterfall  
Where tears pour down her injured soul.  
The tear-stained one is sadly dressed,  
I slowly sit by her and rest.

My dear one, do you want to tell  
The story of your piece of hell?  
For I have all the time it takes  
To listen to you as your heart breaks.

We'll gather each and every piece,  
And stitch them back, we will not cease.  
Forgiveness you do not need to seek,  
For nothing wrong did you do or speak.

I see the garment of shame you wear,  
It does not fit your frame, my dear.  
Whoever said it was your dress,  
Told a lie, caused your duress.

We will fling it far from here,  
Your brand new dress will hold no fear.  
For you will wear your lovely worth,  
No guilt, no stain, just your rebirth.

But for now, we will just sit awhile,  
For I have come this many a mile,  
To listen and to wipe your tears,  
To help you bid goodbye to fears.

To invite you when your faith returns,  
Come near the fire that ever burns.  
The fire removes the chill in bones,  
Returns light to eyes where it has not shone.

When in worth and dignity you are dressed,  
I'll watch you rise from your sad rest.

And walk the road where you must trod,  
To find another who has lost her God.

\*\*\*

The Reverend Dr. Barbara Edema has been a pastor for over twenty-five years. Her most recent pastorate was interim work at an open and affirming church in Grand Ledge, Michigan. She is a survivor of sexual abuse. She is the author of poems and prose about abuse and healing. She is also the author of The Pastor Maggie Series available at Amazon.com and Pen-L.com. She is a wife, mother, and happy owner of four rescue cats.

**Asking For Help**  
**by Doni Shepard**

At eleven, she sits coyly in the  
office of the neighborhood therapist.  
Illustrates memories, the  
touch, talk, taste of torture.  
The clinician tells her she will  
follow one of two paths—  
the prude, the whore.  
Tells her fate is fate.  
She tells her family  
she doesn't want to  
return.  
They say she needs the help.

\*\*\*

Doni Shepard is a poet and lifetime learner residing in Washington. Her poetry, personal essays, and journalism have been featured by Lunch Ticket, Dirty Chai, Bloodletters Literary Magazine, Calamus Journal, Crab Fat Magazine, The Thought Erotic, Ursus Americanus Press, and Yes Poetry, among others. She holds a MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University in Los Angeles.

\*Asking For Help was originally published in *Calamus Journal*.

## **Healing** **by Serafina Valenzuela**

Healing The chaos spins around her mind - comfortable yet abrasive.  
She smiles in isolation and she finds solace in consistency - in the comfortable.  
He has entered her world and has changed it for the better, loving the parts of her she wishes she could erase.  
Her family loves and tries their best, but somehow war always seems to infiltrate the quiet.  
And so, they left wounds. Wounds that would take years to discover and decades to heal.  
He has helped. He has performed surgeries and given stitches, but he is not the cure.  
Only she is the cure. She must learn to love herself like she loves him.  
He cannot force her, and he cannot fix her - no one can - but he loves anyway.  
She walks through the forests of guilt and shame on a journey that must be taken alone.  
She finds solace again in loneliness, but only for so long, only until she remembers who she is.  
The skies darken, and the forest ground softens, it bends with every step she takes.  
Everything is changing, and nothing is steady - for the exploration of healing is not a stable one.  
At nights the demons arise, taunting her, reviving the demons that she thought had been laid to rest.  
The thoughts consuming her fragile mind outrace her attempts to breath, to calm.  
Fear is a futile monster, for he is not real, but yet he can ruin every relationship and destroy every ounce of trust.  
The monster has emerged tonight, to remind her of why she favors isolation in the first place.  
In isolation, no expectation can fall short and no faith can be shaken.  
But he enters the forest with her.  
Not to suppress the futile monster, but to acknowledge and to oppose.  
He doesn't flip on the lights and he doesn't shake her awake, he walks with her.  
Not always side by side, because there are parts of this journey she must walk alone.  
But when her eyes perceive the unknown as darkness, he sheds a little light.  
She is beginning to realize that, perhaps, she is worthy of this light.

\*\*\*

Serafina Valenzuela is a college writer and poet. She is studying to become a trauma therapist and intends to use her experiences to aid others in finding ways to heal. Her writings center around her own traumas, in which she reveals the realities of her pain while instilling hope into her works.

**THE BEST IN THE WORLD**  
by Rebecca Redshaw

I never saw Julie run. As the door locked behind me and I approached the sign-in book, I sensed tonight would be different from other visits. Opening the bag of frozen yogurt for the nurse's inspection, I noticed across the hallway, the door to Julie's room ajar.

"She's had a difficult session," a bearded attendant mumbled as I moved toward the room. No more warning prepared me for the change.

Julie and I had spoken on the phone earlier in the day.

"Yes, I'll be by later tonight. Anything you'd like? Chocolate?"

"Did you hear?" she said. "I tried again."

"When? How?"

"They took my watch. Ya' know the small metal clasp?"

I pushed the door gently. The room was lit by a sole table lamp that cast shadows on the sink in the corner of the room and the desk strewn with crayons and construction paper. I glanced at the bed. Julie was curled on her side, head resting on a pillow at the foot of the bed. I stepped closer to her. She didn't blink. She stared into nowhere. I set the bag of yogurt next to the lamp and leaned over my friend.

"Julie?" Softly. "Julie, its Katherine." I touched her. She was oblivious to my presence. I'd left the door slightly open, not knowing if help might be needed. Would she struggle or cry out? Would my visit soothe or trigger?

I was just a friend, not a best friend or even a close one. We'd shared some secrets at the gym while working out together. Women do. Somewhere between my WASP establishment, suburban lifestyle and her street-wise, world-traveled athletic career, we found a common bond. I'm not sure what it was that brought us together, but as I gave the yogurt to the nurse and returned to Julie's room, I closed the door. We were alone. Whatever she was feeling and whatever we would share in the moments to follow was private. And I was not afraid.

I pulled the straight-backed chair flush with the bed and gently grasped her left hand with my right. The bandage on her wrist was clean and pink against her brown skin. My shoulders tightened as I imagined the pain she felt cutting through her skin with a dull metal point. Leaning forward, I touched her arm.

"I'm here. I'll stay. You're not alone, Julie."

Who knows what to say, what's comforting, what's right?

She didn't move. As I stroked my troubled friend in silence, I noticed her "projects" on the wall. Crude collages and paintings with more insight and feelings than I'd ever seen in a museum; a rainbow in the corner with silver stars, a house surrounded by overlarge flowers, a mother, father, children. A dream she had. A dream we shared.

Julie's body jerked. Her eyes closed. I watched the pain of her unspoken thoughts as she relived a private hell. Time passed. I don't know how much. She struggled, the tension never ending. I held her hand. Red polish chipped. Nails ragged.

She was the best in the world when the United States withdrew from the games. In 1980 Olympics, Julie was faster and stronger than anyone. But the moment passed for everyone that year and for a runner in her prime, four years waiting for the next starting gun is more than a lifetime. We'd talked about it; her return in '84 stifled by a slight muscle pull, training in '88 finally stopped by the reality of her twenty-eight years.

Others had been disappointed, athletes with dreams, but they didn't commit suicide, or try.

Julie's body jerked again. Then, with deliberate determination, she turned on her back. Her eyes fixed on a point somewhere outside the sealed window, somewhere in the darkness. She held onto me still and I moved closer to her side. Resting my hand on the bed opposite her waist I could feel her physical power. She hadn't eaten for weeks, at least anything of substance, yet her body was hard and muscular. For hours, Julie ran the corridors, past the nurses' station, past the conference room and kitchen, full stride, still strong, still powerful.

The pain experienced behind her closed eyes eased for a moment. She looked at me and stared. Finally, I said, "Julie, Julie, I care."

She never blinked. A tear fell despite my efforts to be strong. She released my hand and brushed my cheek. Her dark, full lips, parched from medication, began to move. I leaned closer.

"When I was little, I was raped."

The tears I had fought for so long lined my taut cheeks and stained my silk blouse. She looked at me and painstakingly pulled me closer. Her lips barely moving, she whispered, "I love you, Katherine, like a sister." She held me. "We are alike, aren't we?"

We held each other. I heard the door open behind me, then close. After a while, I pulled away.

"Close your eyes and sleep." I stroked her forehead and held her hand well into the night. I couldn't change what happened, but for a time in her life, a moment we shared, Julie stopped running.

\*\*\*

Rebecca Redshaw is an author and playwright. In addition to extensive articles and short stories published in national newspapers and magazines, she published a novella, *Dear Jennifer* as well as *SOFA CINEMA: An Easy Guide to DVDs, Vol. 1* - a compilation of her published DVD critiques. A theatrical adaptation of *Dear Jennifer* and *FOUR WOMEN*, an original play, have been produced in the United States and Canada. She was awarded First Prize in the 2009 Lakeview Literary Review for her short story, "Somebody Special". Her short stories, "Mrs. "C" and "The Picnic" have also been honored with awards. Currently, she is at work on her fourth novel and eighth play. A complete literary vita can be accessed at [www.rebeccaredshaw.com](http://www.rebeccaredshaw.com).

**Where There's Quiet**  
**by I. Grey**

First impressions are everything. Things happen for a reason. You win some you lose some.  
What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

I used to believe in these adages, that in one neat statement problems can be solved and what's broken can be fixed. But no single thing is ever that simple. And the more you pile them up the more unsteady they become until it all falls apart.

I was alone until I wasn't. And even when I wasn't alone, I was. That's what happens when someone takes choice from you. At first it was quiet, almost like it didn't really happen. My friend was standing in front of me. My class was waiting in line for recess, when two boys ran up one after the other, cupping me between my legs as if checking for available parts. Mechanical. One. Two. And they didn't look down; they looked right in my eyes. My face must have betrayed me because my friend looked at me in a way that confirmed it was real before she said that we should tell the teacher. Even so it took me a few more seconds to connect their actions with my body. It was my first introduction to touch with the opposite sex, and choice was taken from me before I had the chance to make it. It was sneaky and cheap and it happened so fast that it almost didn't. Except that it did. And once it happened it couldn't unhappen. I couldn't make it unhappen. And I didn't know then that more was coming.

In retrospect, it always gets worse before it gets better. And there's the quiet before the storm. And the adages always find their way back. The boys did, too. Come back. And they kept taking what I had for myself. They even took what I wasn't old enough to know I could lose. I think on some level I knew I was being ruined, little by little. Redrawn into something else. I didn't know how hard I'd have to fight or that sometimes I would lose anyway. I just knew that the quiet was a dangerous place. That like the dark, things happen in the quiet without your permission.

It was hard trying to find my voice when what I had to say made me feel like forgotten silver. Like maybe I was worth the work, but who wants to sit around scrubbing away at all that rust? I

was a sweet child by nature, nervous, extremely shy, and a bit disoriented in public. I didn't know how to advocate for myself, but I found words that brought out the quiet in their faces. The moment you tell someone you've been compromised a dark wave seems to form over the eyes. Even the mouth jerks in such a way that you become acutely aware that you're no longer what you were to them. Suddenly, you need saving, protecting, but what's worse is that you're no longer brand new. Slightly used, you lose some of your power, your dignity, and maybe even your own face if you're not careful. I did.

It was a troublesome time full of meetings, reenactments, and shame. And then I stopped talking. Of course, I laughed and joked, but if I had anything real in my head, that's where it stayed. It wasn't that my trust had to be earned; trusting was no longer an option. That year taught me how dangerous people were, and that the best way to guarantee my safety was to always be waiting. I also thought for a long time that I could use the quiet to my advantage. Knowledge is power and what people don't know...

Nothing is ever as precise as a few clever words strung together to form a well-crafted thought. I wish it were sufficient: I was molested; I survived; I kept getting molested; I kept surviving. I wish the words were enough on their own, but they still haunt me. Just like my classmates, all those moments, the quiet places my memory doesn't want to visit. They were just hands. That's what I used to tell myself to feel better. But all it did was make me feel foolish for feeling everything else. I haven't thought much about what they must have been thinking when they decided it would be me that first time. Their swift, robotic movements implied, though, that they had discussed a plan before taking turns on me. Do you want to know what it feels like? Who should we do it to? I'll do it first, and then, you go. Let's do her. She's quiet. She won't say a word.

I reported them that same afternoon, but it wasn't until that evening when my parents pulled the details from me. I was so alone in the living room, forced to touch my mother where they had touched me while my father watched. If they didn't know what happened, how could they defend me? After all, it was an accusation. They needed to know, they said, so they could be in my corner. And that's what it felt like. Another corner. Another trap. Another quiet place.

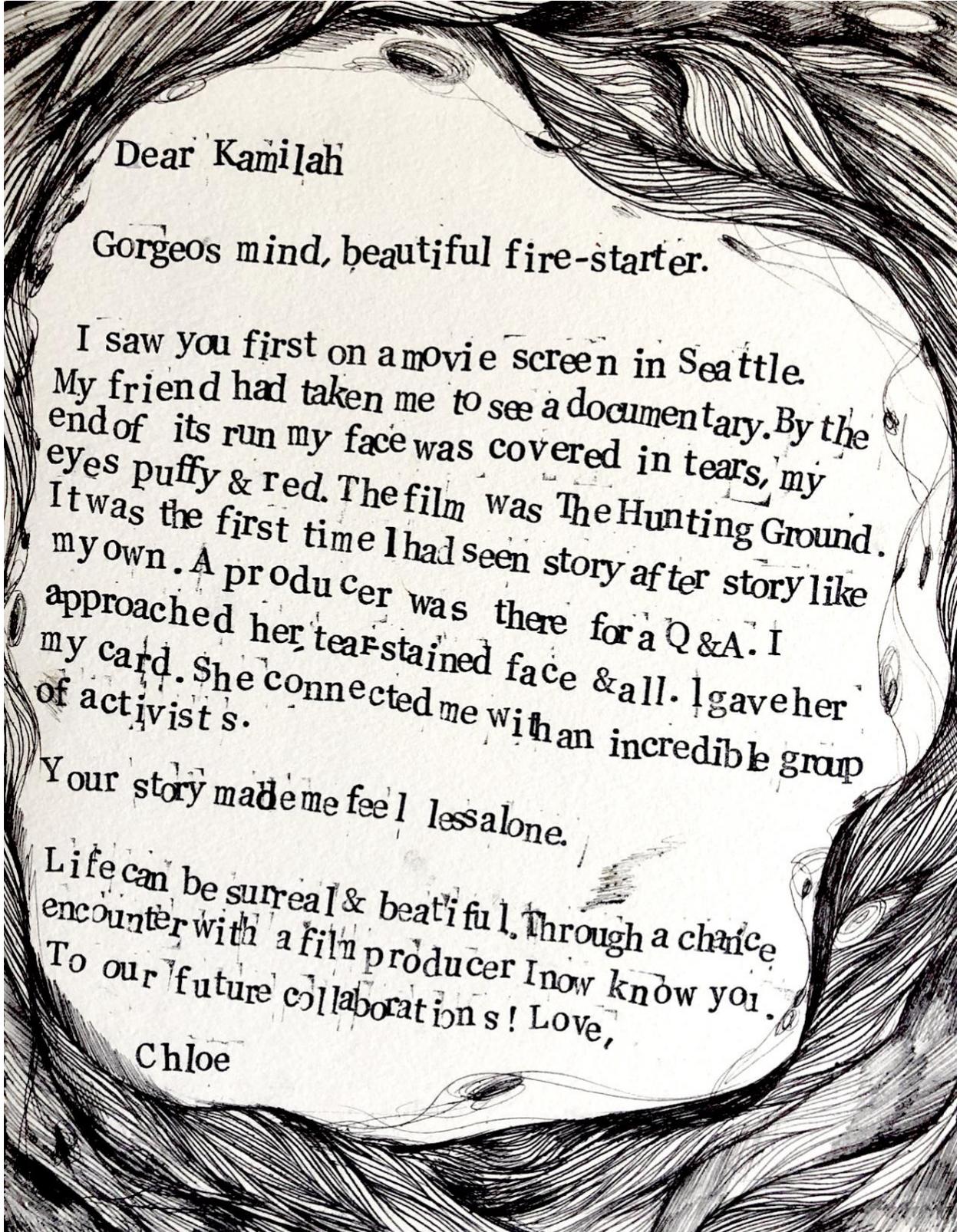
I didn't know what innocence was until it was ripped from me. And I didn't have the words then to express it, but that's what they took. I can't imagine what their cigarette-stained teeth must smell like now, or how their cracked, careless fingers must feel as they snap against each other to the beat of some misogynistic song. I still think of them as children. I can still see their eyes looking into my petrified body as if I were placed here just for them. At least now I have the words to fight back. They writhe and twist in my mind waiting for a chance to strike. Often, the more eloquent options are just out of reach, but anything's better than the quiet.

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I. Grey is a freelance editor, writer, and ghostwriter. She loves words and believes that they are the means by which we will change this world. When she isn't writing, she's enjoying the mysteries that accompany each of her interactions.

**Kamilah**  
by Chloe Allred





Dear Kamilah

Gorgeous mind, beautiful fire-starter.

I saw you first on a movie screen in Seattle. My friend had taken me to see a documentary. By the end of its run my face was covered in tears, my eyes puffy & red. The film was The Hunting Ground. It was the first time I had seen story after story like my own. A producer was there for a Q&A. I approached her tear-stained face & all. I gave her my card. She connected me with an incredible group of activists.

Your story made me feel less alone.

Life can be surreal & beautiful. Through a chance encounter with a film producer I now know you. To our future collaborations! Love,

Chloe

## **A Shame Not Ours to Hold** **by Tracy Haught**

“Stories save your life. And stories are your life. We are our stories, stories that can be both prison and the crowbar to break open the door of that prison...”

Rebecca Solnit, *The Mother of All Questions*

Inspired by the #MeToo movement and angered by the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination, hearing, and subsequent confirmation, I felt compelled to speak out about being a victim of rape and the systemic objectification and sexual exploitation of women. My idea being that I would list every incident I could remember from childhood on, where I'd either been touched, followed, spoken inappropriately to, or was physically hurt by the opposite sex. I thought: *Wouldn't that be powerful, to see how much of our lives are shaded by the darkness of others?*

Running hastily through event after event in my head, I became physically and emotionally overwhelmed. A panicked anger ached within me. I thought about the startling fact that I know only a few women who've not been victimized by a man. I scrolled through jagged memories: this is what happened to me, and this is what happened to me, and this is what happened to me. My past experiences glow a little dimmer now as youth retreats, but it's staggering how, when I give those memories my attention, they can take me by the throat, take the air away.

*Thirteen.*

*Getting drunk and passing out for the first time at a friend's house. Two boys shoving the head a screwdriver into my mouth, in and out, laughing as I lie choking, then vomiting. "Fuck her, dude," they told a third who was standing somewhere nearby. They left him alone with me so he could do it. The vodka wouldn't let me open my eyes. I felt his nakedness on me, him changing his mind and leaving me alone. He left and told them he'd done it.*

It's overwhelming to write about such things. And that's what it comes down to, by standing up for myself, by speaking my truth, I'd have to not only relive the memory of the events, but I'd have to carry the pain, that hugeness, the splitting me away from who I really am. Not to mention I'd be opening myself up to potential criticism and judgment. Look what happened to Christine Blasey Ford when she came forward with her accusations of sexual assault against Kavanaugh. She was victimized, again, in her attempt to share truth and protect the

American people from a predator becoming an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, and it didn't matter; he was confirmed anyway and she was put through hell.

So, I told myself I didn't have to write about it.

And of course, it was all I could think about. Writing it has actually created a release, a sense of relief inside of me. It's empowering beyond what I believed possible, not pain-free, but freeing.

According to Rebecca Solnit, in her book, *The Mother of All Questions*, "Being unable to tell your story is a living death and sometimes a literal one" (P.19).

I've held onto my stories for so long, allowing them to fester with a shame that was not mine to hold. The real shame is that our stories exist at all. That most of us don't come forward because we know there will be no justice for what happened to us. In the United States only three percent of rapists will serve time for their crimes. The only certainty of coming forward is that we, the victims, will suffer more.

Most of my life I've tried to distract myself from what lurks temporarily dormant in the files of Tracy Haught. I try to stay in the moment, focus on my breath and the things I'm grateful for. I avoid watching the news as much as possible; it's painful and makes me feel sick. I put my head in the sand, come up for air, put my head in the sand, come up for air. And then I feel guilt for not wanting to know.

The powerlessness that comes from living in such a fucked up world drives us to either give up/look away/cry/eat/scream/hide/distract/medicate/meditate. The last being my best answer.

When women speak out, seek justice, or try to make a difference, when they protest, they are ridiculed, vilified, harassed, jailed and killed. Women have known silence for so long. It is an overwhelming comfort to see women speaking out now, whether loud-voiced with shoulders back, or teary-eyed and soft-spoken, it doesn't matter how we do it, we *are* speaking it. If we continue to come together, to lift our voices and each other, we can shut this silencing shit down. We need to set a fire so bright that the darkness will no longer hang over us like the ugly curtain it is, smothering our light.

We need to be fierce; they'll call us bitches either way, so let's all get in on the taking down of this patriarchal imprisonment.

We need to keep talking about *it*.

We need to shout about what living in this rape culture does to us. I want to call out to every woman to sing out your broken song, and if your voice cracks in the process, I'll sing along with you; we'll sing together and it will be sad and beautiful and we will be strong, together. If, by some miracle, you've managed to avoid being a victim, then give a big sigh of gratitude and be the back up band for your sisters.

The more we speak of what it actually looks like to be victimized as women, the more people will care. When people care, they're usually more inclined to act.

My list goes on and on from the time I was very young up until this past year. Men do things. They just do. Why? Because they know they'll most likely get away with it.

Last year I was working in a small elementary school as a substitute teacher. It was my favorite school in the two districts I was working in. The second time I subbed there, a younger male teacher, extremely tall and imposing, started showing up in the classrooms I'd be teaching in.

"I just wanted to see how your day's going," he said, the first time he popped his head in. I had no idea who he was. Whatever classroom I was teaching in, he'd always manage to find me. He became friendlier with each visit, complimenting me on my hair, outfit, telling me I must work out because I was in such good shape. I told him that I was married and didn't feel comfortable with his comments. I confided in a friend who also worked there. She said he was married with kids and was a terrible flirt.

One day, when I was subbing in the room next to his, he walked over when I was waiting for my kids to get back from gym and handed me a piece of paper, saying, *if you ever need anything... grinned, walked away*. When I looked down at the paper I saw it was his phone number.

I've had so many traumatic past experiences that a kind of a shut down occurs in me in these kinds of situations. Even though I was in a public place, even though he wasn't forcing himself on me, I felt myself go into a kind of silent panic. I started shaking. I told myself that the next time he paid me a visit I would threaten to go to the principal (who was his friend) and human resources. Of course, as usual with men like this, it happened again. He actually smiled innocently, beaming down at me in amusement, and said, "So you really don't want to have sex with me? Like your saying it's never going to happen?"

It was all a big joke to him, probably because nobody had ever reported him or told his wife. He was a star basketball player in high school and an accomplished coach and teacher. I didn't report him either.

I never went back to that school or those kids.

I've been programmed to believe that I probably did something wrong to give the impression that I wanted these advances. I've also been programmed to feel guilty at the idea of getting someone in trouble for this kind of behavior. The whole "*boys being boys*" argument tells us that these are our roles, that to get Him in trouble is to wreck His life. It doesn't matter how He hurts or scars us. God forbid His bad behavior would have consequences.

These false, subconscious ideas of protecting male offenders are embedded from an early age.

Being a victim once is enough, right?

I can remember being very young and being terrified to tell anyone how a much older boy, *the grandson of a neighbor, trapping me in his grandmother's house, pushing me down and rubbing himself against me*. I was able to get away from him before anything worse happened, but I never told anyone. I was terrified of what people would think of me and even more scared of what he would do to me if I told. I thought I'd done something wrong.

An old friend of mine recently made a post on her social media account in regard to the #MeToo movement in which she talked about being sexually assaulted by a neighbor when she was a little girl. She said she told her mom and they called the police, but nothing was done about it. They didn't believe her.

Almost twenty women have accused Donald Trump of sexual assault and yet many people didn't/don't believe the women, and they voted for him anyway. Women actually voted for him. Who hears that a man has been accused by that many women of sexual assault or harassment and thinks it's okay for him to be president? How can a person not question if maybe there could be some truth to the accusations if that many women are coming forward.

But this is the world we live in.

*When I was fourteen, I was raped. It would happen again at nineteen.* I'd just made a new friend at school. She wanted to spend the night at my house and surprised me by bringing LSD. My mom left for the night. The girl told me she'd invited a few friends to come over. One of those friends was her twenty-one-year-old acid dealer. Afterward, I admitted what had

happened to my sister. Admitted, because she'd suspected something had happened to me. Admitted, because I felt *I'd* done something wrong. A couple of days after the rape, at school, a boy came up to me and put out his hand like he wanted to give me something. I held my hand out and he dropped a bullet into my palm. He said, "That's a little gift from \_\_\_\_\_."

Done. Silenced forever.

*He didn't listen when I said, No. He wouldn't let me leave the room. I tried to keep him away from me. He didn't care that I was crying. He forced me onto the bed, held me down, one hand holding both of my arms folded across my chest, and raped me.*

*I couldn't scream. I couldn't get my voice to work. I was completely powerless. I hallucinated that he was a monster with a thousand arms. He smelled bad. He was big, had a really big belly. I felt like I was being stabbed, broken open. I felt like I couldn't breathe. Like I was dying. And I couldn't scream. I couldn't get air. So, in my mind, I was at fault.*

*When I was nineteen it happened again.*

*My roommate was out of town. A friend I'd just met came over to hang out. Turned out the girl was on house arrest and was using me to get to see her boyfriend, who was facing potential jail time for a robbery she'd helped him with. He showed up with a male friend. The girl and her boyfriend immediately went to my bedroom. The male friend moved from a chair to the couch, sitting very close to me. I told him I had a boyfriend (I didn't) and that nothing was going to happen. He kept playfully trying to take my clothes off. When I yelled at him to stop he became angry and forced me back on the couch. He pulled my pants down with one hand, held me down with the other, and then raped me. Only this time I screamed. I screamed and screamed at him. He was furious, tried to shut me up, but I did what I thought I was supposed to do. It didn't matter.*

Another part of me was broken that day, a piece of myself torn away into some nether region of my being. This broken-ness I carry like a handful of sharp glass inside me, never sure when it's going to cut me. I could be watching a movie, going for a walk, getting intimate, and then suddenly I'm depleted, frozen, terrified, wishing I could tear my body away from my mind.

My new friend didn't come to my aid when I was screaming. She came out and found me on the floor sobbing, unable to speak. She looked at me like *I don't wanna know*.

They all left.

I called a friend but couldn't get the words out. She heard me crying, came right away, and took me to the hospital. I knew I'd done everything I was supposed to. I wasn't drinking or doing drugs. I even screamed. How fucked up is it that I thought it mattered? I said *no*. That's all I was *supposed* to do. He was supposed to back the fuck off when he didn't have consent, bottom line.

So, I reported it. The accused wasn't taken to the hospital. He didn't have hairs from his head and pubic area ripped out. He didn't have an internal exam. He didn't have to tell what happened to him over and over again.

So many nights I'd wake from nightmares, sweating, my heart racing. I had recurring nightmares for a long time. His family's private investigator called me. He pressed me on whether or not I was telling the truth. He asked me to drop the charges, telling me how devastating it would be to my rapist and his family. I lived in fear of what He might do to me. I moved. I started drinking heavily.

In court, I sat and listened to people vouch for his character, saying that it couldn't be true. I sat mutely, my eyes down. I couldn't look at him. When I'd been in the hall before the hearing, he'd come up behind me, walking as closely as he could when he passed me. Every nerve in my body screamed. I wanted to run away. I felt my inner being twisting. When it was time for me to speak to the judge, I recounted what happened (again) and simply said that I would never be the same. He got two years, but they said he'd probably get out on probation after a few months.

For many years after, I lived in fear that he'd find me.

That he'd seek revenge for my getting him in trouble. I looked for very tall, strong boyfriends that made me feel safe. I felt an overwhelming sense of relief when I married a couple of years later and changed my last name. As a woman, I've never fully felt safe walking anywhere alone, day or night. I know what's out there waiting to hurt me, *who* will hurt me.

I couldn't hold a job. My first job after that was cooking at a local bar. The owner would call his female employees downstairs to his office for various reasons. He'd then follow you

back up the stairs so he could accidentally feel your ass. During this time, I stayed overnight at a friend's house and woke to find her neighbor's hand on my breast, his other hand on his penis.

I could go on and on and on, as could so many women I know. You can't get away from it. Nowhere is safe.

This sexual exploitation and objectification creates a shift in you. I remember looking at my daughter Emma when she was thirteen, and thinking how young she was. I thought about the thirteen year old me. About the time I was trapped in a car with two boys.

*A boy I knew from school offered me a ride home. It was his older friend's car; his friend was driving. They parked the car halfway to my house, refusing to drive any further until I performed oral sex. I refused. After being forced, after trying to escape, crawling onto the floor of the car, trying to make myself so small, in a ball, tucking my head, trying to get their hands and penises away from me. They finished and I fell out of the car and stumbled home.*

I felt this heavy horror when I thought about my daughter being the same age that I was then. My heart broke for my child-self and for what's out there: predators waiting for that right moment to pounce on our daughters, on us. It's hard to think about how young I was and what that does to you.

I talked to my daughter about the dangers that girls face. I gave her advice. I continually reminded her to never go anywhere alone.

Just before my daughter turned fifteen, she was raped. It didn't matter how much I'd tried to protect her. Without going into her story too much, I will just say, it was an older boy, a star athlete from a good home, with successful parents.

She had a nearly fatal suicide attempt a couple months later.

She didn't want to give her rapists name for fear of what would happen to her. She knew that most people wouldn't side with her, they'd accuse her of lying (some of her friends did), and they'd only see that she was ruining his future.

She said, *his dad's a minister and his mom's an attorney – they won't believe me.* I did not teach her this. She learned this from the world. This *is* our world. And it's long overdue that we should be able to say that this *was* our world.

From generation to generation, women have been and are targeted, simply because we're women, because *they*, those men who look upon us as objects, think they can get away with it, because they are getting away with it. It's fucking enough. We can't let them get away with it anymore.

Not one more daughter, not one more of us.

\*\*\*

Tracy Haught earned a BA in English literature and creative writing from Cameron University. Her work has appeared in *Cybersoleil*, *Magnapoets*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *Poetry For The Masses*, *Polyphony*, *Prime Mincer*, *Sugar Mule*, *The Whistling Fire*, and was anthologized in "Ain't Nobody That Can Sing Like Me." She lives in Montpelier, Vermont, where she is a MFA Fiction candidate in the Vermont College of Fine Arts Writing and Publishing Program.

**All The Little Wasted Things**  
**by Jason Kaufman**

The memory  
is of sunlight  
piercing the holes  
in the rotting siding  
and the dirt floors, oiled  
and beaten hard  
as concrete.

For more than a century  
the tool shed sheltered  
my family's gardening tools.  
The rusted spades and hoes.  
Hickory handles  
polished smooth and dark  
by the work of my great-grandfather's hands  
and the hands of his father before him.  
A minister in the Baptist church,  
he dedicated himself to tilling the land,  
mixing with it the compost  
he nurtured by hand  
from all the little wasted things  
left in his wake.  
This, the greater gospel  
of our indebtedness to the dead.  
Bless those who have ears to hear  
the parable of the chaffe and the wheat.  
Bless those who prepare the ground  
so that the seeds of our beings  
might take root and flourish.

I was eight years old  
when the neighbor girl  
took me by the hand  
and led me into the tool shed.  
She told me she wanted to play house  
and she laid me upon the slick,  
tamped earth, removing my pants  
the way it had been done to her.  
I have no room to hate this child,  
just a few years older than me,  
nor her abuser in turn.  
I simply hold a space

for this great chain of heartbreak,  
churning it  
into the rich hummus of my soul  
that something beautiful  
might take root and flourish.

\*\*\*

Jason Kaufman is a poet and visual artist living in Mansfield, Ohio. Fatherhood, backpacking, post-structuralism, Buddhism, theopoetics, and mental health advocacy are the major influences in his work. Jason has won various awards for his sculptural work, is the theatrical set designer at the Renaissance Theatre, and is a contributing editor at Voices from the Borderlands. His poetry has been published in Semaphore Magazine and Wordpeace Literary Journal. You can follow his work on Instagram @jasonkaufman\_artist.

**Ask The Why**  
**by Grace Kathleen Snyder**

They ask me many things.  
Many, as in a lot,  
Things, as in mysteries I can't be bothered to explain.  
Why the cattle groove thin trails in the fields.  
Why the rooster crows in the yolk of the sun.  
Why we trust the Man more than we trust our mothers.

My mother was a brittle woman  
Pretending her heart didn't melt like the sunset.  
I was all she had left  
After a drought only she remembered to mourn.  
She never talks about it.  
I understand why, now that I have had fires claim my body.  
People ask you if you truly burned, because they don't see the scars.  
Flinches are dismissed. Walking in the daylight is looked over.  
Flashlights in the dark are covered, smothering the only light I can hold.

They ask for proof.  
I only have trauma.  
Cowering shoulders take cover from male strangers.  
They act insulted.

I am injured.

\*\*\*

Grace Kathleen Snyder is a junior in college and is majoring in English with a focus on creative writing, primary education, and am minoring in English as a second language. Grace Kathleen Snyder wants to teach English in South Korea for a few years after graduation.

**Andromeda**  
**by Michael Russell**

*After Brenda Shaughnessy*

In the doctor's office almost everyone is sick.  
You pull out a book—Our Andromeda—

you want to get lost in a galaxy  
where illness is pins and needles in your feet, half asleep,

but death and sickness and grief  
all live in Andromeda.

Even in that galaxy HIV is a possibility  
of your rape. In Andromeda your mother would wait

by your side instead of leaning over a table drinking, drinking. She knows  
nothing. In Andromeda she would know everything:

how he lured you in like a fish without a hook,  
how he scared you into staying the night,

how he unmade your body (to put it gently).  
You would spare her the details, the horror of what plays out like film

in your head. You would tell her why, finally, you ate yourself  
into another person. Why your belly, soft and plump as a pig's,

kept you safe. But this isn't Andromeda  
and the doctor is calling your name.

\*

You sit in front of your doctor, canvas-faced  
and ask for an HIV test.

You tell her you practiced unsafe sex—  
omit that it was with a man,

omit that he pried you open like a lobster,  
omit that no dribbled from your mouth like a leaky faucet.

In Andromeda your doctor would know when you are lying.

She would put one hand above your heart, the other above your brain

and let the information travel from you to her and back.

In Andromeda there are no secrets

between patient and physician.

In fact, the physician is a sort of guardian angel

with her white lab coat and stethoscope.

In Andromeda she wouldn't just hand you a requisition

and point you to the nurse's lounge, no,  
she would try to ground you—

mould your feet into nails  
and plant them into the soft body of the floor.

\*

You wait for the nurse to take your blood.

It is the same here as it is on Earth—

a vampire needle, a rubber tourniquet, test tubes, cotton.

She asks for your arm, wraps the turquoise tourniquet around your bicep.

The vein pops. She takes a cloud of cotton  
soaked in alcohol, runs it along your vein.

She can feel your stomach churn and twist and knot  
as the needle approaches. She is a fully flowered empath.

All Andromedan nurses are.

This is Andromeda in all its glory:

the nurse's vein blooms  
when the needle is inserted in yours,

blood rivers down her arm into a donation sack  
as yours is caught in test tubes.

You stare at the test tubes, deep red—  
remind yourself positive or negative

it's never over—  
it's never over.

\*\*\*

Michael Russell is a survivor and queer poet with BPD, Bipolar Disorder and massive jolts of anxiety. He is also a superhero. He is working on his first chapbook and lives in Toronto. His work has appeared in *cahoodaloodaling*, *Forage*, *The Maynard*, *(parenthetical)*, *Prairie Fire*, *The Quilliad*, *untethered* among other places. He thinks you're fantabulous.

\*Another version of *Andromeda* was first published in the Fall 2016 issue of *The Maynard*.

\* Please listen to Michael Russel read *Andromeda* on Awakened Voices website.

## **Bad Reputation** **by Sugar Lafever**

It was 1982 and I was tired of being me. Joan Jett was everything I wasn't and everything I wanted to be. So I went with my bestie to see Anthony who said all I needed was to dye my hair blue-black. My parents would've never gone for it. Instead, he cut my hair in a shag style. I started wearing lots of eyeliner & a black leather jacket. I was the first girl in the whole school to wear faux leather pants. People kept coming up to me at lunch wanting to touch my pants to see what real genuine faux leather felt like. ("Do ya wanna touch?") I started smoking, mostly Marlboros because they meant you were tough. But I secretly preferred Virginia Slims which tasted better & had a cool, "slim" shape. Plus they had all those funny ads of women back in the day showing their independence by smoking. Nothing says you're independent like being allowed to choose to kill yourself with smokes, right?

It was a new school. No one knew me. So I decided to hang out after the bell rang on the little bridge on the school grounds. Me and some other girls smoked & tried to look cool while pretending we were too cool to care about looking cool. 2 other girls were always there, leading the pack. Lia & Andrea. Lia looked a lot like me but had an ultra cool attitude set off further by her frameless specs tinted purple & her tranquil attitude. Rumor had it that Andrea had been in juvie. She never smiled. She had a long jagged scar on her cheek that people said was from a knife fight. Or a cat scratch. "Who are you? Why are you here? You don't belong here!" she barked at me after a few days of hanging out wordlessly on the bridge.

\*\*\*\*\*

So skipping school was probably a bad idea. Flame-haired chain smoker Jessica had left school but she still hung around with kids her age. She took me under her wing and decided we'd hang out with her boyfriend Terry.

Terry was an old guy with frizzy hair and a stained wifebeater shirt on. Jessica cuddled up to him and suggested I do the same, telling me how hot I was. "Do you have any beer?" I stammered.

Terry handed me a Bud. The apartment had only a couch and nothing in the fridge but beer. After the beer, I began to studiously chew a piece of Bubblicious until it was liquid. Upon escape, I spit the Bubblicious out on the sidewalk and marveled at its baby pink puddle. I decided to stop at the arcade for a quick game of Pac man. On the way, an old pot bellied guy started chasing me, saying filthy things and gesturing with his tongue. I ran inside the arcade, blurting to the clerk what had happened. The policeman said my pants were too tight.

\*\*\*\*\*

So I went to a sleepover at my bestie's friend's house. Rumor had it her Lisa's boyfriend beat her up. Our mutual friend Dee Dee comes down the stairs and I find myself unable to look away. She is really looking sharp.

In the middle of the night, Lisa's sister's fiancé tries to climb on top of me in bed! Dee Dee doesn't even wake up. I'm afraid & scared but I shove him away isn't too tough 'cause he's super wasted. Lisa and her family act like the fiancé is an angel.

The following Monday at school is a real bummer, too. I am sitting in Miss Russo's English class. Suddenly 3 troublemaker boys start whispering things to me that she can't hear and putting their hands all over me when she is not looking. I don't want to cause a scene so I glare at them instead. John leers at me, his protruding yellow teeth looking even more so under the fluorescent beams. He smells like sweat. After a few days, I tell the teacher, privately, after class. She doesn't believe me. Just like when I was in 4th grade. My favorite teacher didn't believe me when I told him the boy who sat next to me kept putting his hands up my skirt and telling me I had something under there which I was too young to hear about. My own teacher didn't believe me!

\*\*\*\*

I decide to find out if Lisa is telling the truth about her boyfriend beating her. So I invite her boyfriend to my house when my parents aren't there. We start to kiss. I tease him that "XYZ!

Your zipper's down!" He gets super mad and raises his hand to slap me. That's when I grab his hand and tell him if he touches me he'll be going to jail because he's 18 and I'm a minor. I never see him again.

\*\*\*\*

I go with my bestie to cute Bob's house. I finally get my chance to kiss Bob but he says I'm not doing it right & passes me off to a gleeful Tommy. Tommy presses me down on the cold hardwood floor & holds my arms down so tight I can't move. I panic thinking he's going to rape me. Instead, he just kisses me and sticks his tongue in my mouth which is bad enough.

The rumor gets around school that I am easy. I walk to school alone to give me time to think. When I arrive on the bridge, I see Lia and Andrea again. Andrea gives me a rare smile. We don't talk much but we share a couple smokes. Lia asks if I like anyone. I tell her yeah, I kinda do.

I'm tired of the chasing of boys.

\*\*\*

**Don't Give Them the Satisfaction and Other Lies**  
**by Angela Mackintosh**

Carts stacked with steamer baskets roll by—sticky buns stuffed with roasted pork, white gelatinous dumplings, garlicky baby bok choy, egg custard tarts—that you snatch and tally on an order sheet. Freshly diced ginger root, more perfume than pickle, tangs the air. You and your husband are the only English-speaking people at dim sum.

When you walk to the bathroom, you realize how stuffed you are, and untuck your button-down shirt from your jeans. An old Asian man with white eyebrows, like two cranes in flight, shuffles down the narrow aisle. You flank the wall to let him by. As he passes, he thrusts his elbow straight to the side like someone doing the chicken dance and brushes it against your left boob. Startled, a wave of heat rises through your body, peppers your cheeks, clutches your throat, the sensation from his elbow still needling your breast. You turn to look at him. He acts as though nothing has happened and keeps walking. But there it is in his eye: a secret twinkle of pleasure. The distinct feel of a pillowy boob. Your boob.

In the parking lot, your husband asks what's wrong. You play it off. "Oh, you know, this old dude brushed against my boob."

"Who?" He scans the parking lot. "Did you shove him and tell him to fuck off?"

You want to say that the man didn't speak English, and that's why you didn't say anything. But you know in your heart that's not the real reason why. "Don't worry about it," you say.

He's upset with you the rest of the day. He can't understand why you didn't stick up for yourself.

You want to tell your husband that it's not so easy. That he was raised with a different set of rules. That a lifetime of conditioning has led to your silence.

\*

When you were in elementary school, you attended cotillion once a week, where you wore dainty white gloves and tulle-lined dresses, studied table settings, and learned proper behavior for young ladies. Although you didn't like boys yet, you learned how to dance with a partner. You were paired up with a boy at the beginning of class, and from then on, addressed as Mrs. John F. Whoever, as though you no longer had a name or identity of your own.

Be seen, not heard. Be polite. Ladylike.

You think about the term, “ladylike,” and wonder why *lady*, which means “woman,” and *like*, which means “two things that share similar features,” combine to make the word *ladylike*, which then means “polite and quiet” and “lacking in strength, force, or virility” (Merriam-Webster).

\*

You’re watching a recap of the 2018 World Cup and see reporter Julieth Gonzalez Theran get sexually assaulted on national television. Julieth is standing in the city square, giving a live report, when a large, bearded man with a backwards baseball cap muscles into the shot, pushes his lips on her cheek so forcefully that her head tilts to the side, then squeezes her left breast before running off. She ignores him and keeps reporting, which other newscasters later praise: “Julieth didn’t let the attack faze her one bit. She impressively continued right on with her report as if nothing had happened—even while he was groping her.”

Even while he was groping her.

Even. While. Groping.

Later, on her own Instagram account, Julieth wrote, “We do not deserve this treatment. We are equally valuable professionals. I share the joy of football, but we must identify the limits of affection and harassment.”

Be polite. Ladylike. Laugh things off. Ignore it. Smile, even while getting groped.

Then, after he’s gone, get pissed and write about it. #MeToo it.

What are these actions telling a generation of young women? All women?

\*

That night, after dim sum, you have trouble sleeping. You wonder why you didn’t say anything to the man at the restaurant. As an introvert, you internalize. You process your feelings by holding them in and then writing about them or spilling to your therapist. Conflict tires you. However, you’ve been known to stick up for others when they need help, so that’s not it. You’re also not unfamiliar with the ogling, the groping, the inappropriateness. The teacher who asked you on a date in high school, the ex-boyfriend who shaving-creamed the words “slut” on your car’s windshield, the business deal levered with a sexual proposition. Then there was that time in

Mexico when a drunk Army Ranger had his way with you in the ladies' restroom bent over a sink. No, *had his way with you* is the wrong wording. *Rape* is the right wording. He *raped* you. Because you have to be clear about these things.

You wonder what term should be used for what the man in the restaurant did to you. Groping? Or more specifically, elbow groping? You remember a joke Louis C.K. told on a comedy special: "You ever been in a crowded place, like a subway or a sports stadium, and you're smooshed in with other people and your elbow touches a tit behind you? You're like, *That's a tit. I just touched it. I know that was a tit.* Because the sensitivity of the male elbow to tit flesh, specifically, is unbelievable."

The man in the restaurant purposely thrust his elbow into your boob to cop a feel; so yes, the term is groping. But compared to rape *it's not a big deal*. It's *just* groping...

A 2008 study on college women found that street harassment—a term which includes leering, catcalling, flashing, groping, and sexual assault—had detrimental psychological effects, relating to self-objectification, depression, eating disorders, anxiety, and PTSD.

\*

A week after the dim sum incident, you are walking down the street with your husband who is hard of hearing, and a tall dark man walks by you, lowers his voice and says, "Damn, you lookin' good," something else, then "pussy." You distinctly hear "pussy." You are literally two steps in front of your husband. But you don't say anything. You just roll your eyes and laugh. Pretend the offense rolls right off your back, onto the sidewalk, and into the sewer. A strategy passed down from aunts, mothers, grandmothers—a strategy as American as passing down a recipe for homemade apple pie.

Here's the thing though. It didn't roll off your back. The things you were told: *Don't give them the satisfaction*. The things you told yourself: *It's not a big deal*. These are not strategies. They are lies. You lose a bit of yourself each time.

\*

According to psychologists, the response many women have to street harassment is a "learned helplessness." The term comes from a 1965 study in which scientists gave dogs electrical shocks and recorded how they reacted. They found that once the dogs had been

conditioned to expect a shock, they stopped trying to get away from it. The dogs had learned there was nothing they could do to escape, that nothing they did would have an effect. So, in effect, they did nothing.

\*

*Don't give them the satisfaction.*

*It's not a big deal.*

Silence solves nothing. In fact, silence gives permission, says it's okay. Staying silent tells other women and girls that they aren't worth speaking up for. Staying silent is allowing someone to treat you as a sex object.

You decide that the next time you're in a public place, where it's safe, and someone ogles/catcalls/gropes/makes-you-feel-small, you will turn to them and tell them to stop. Let them know you don't like it.

“Stop. I don't like that.”

Or as your husband suggests: “Fuck off.”

\*

The opportunity arises almost immediately when you're at the grocery store. You're laughing at a text message from your husband while a man in his twenties walks by. “You should smile more often,” he says.

You ignore the lump in your throat. “Why should it matter to you if I smile?”

He raises his eyebrows quizzically. “You got one of those smiles.”

“Do you know it makes me uncomfortable when you say that? In fact, no one likes that.”

He blinks. “Huh? You gorgeous tho...” He offers a confused, closed-lipped smile before walking away.

You want to say, “You should smile more often,” but you don't.

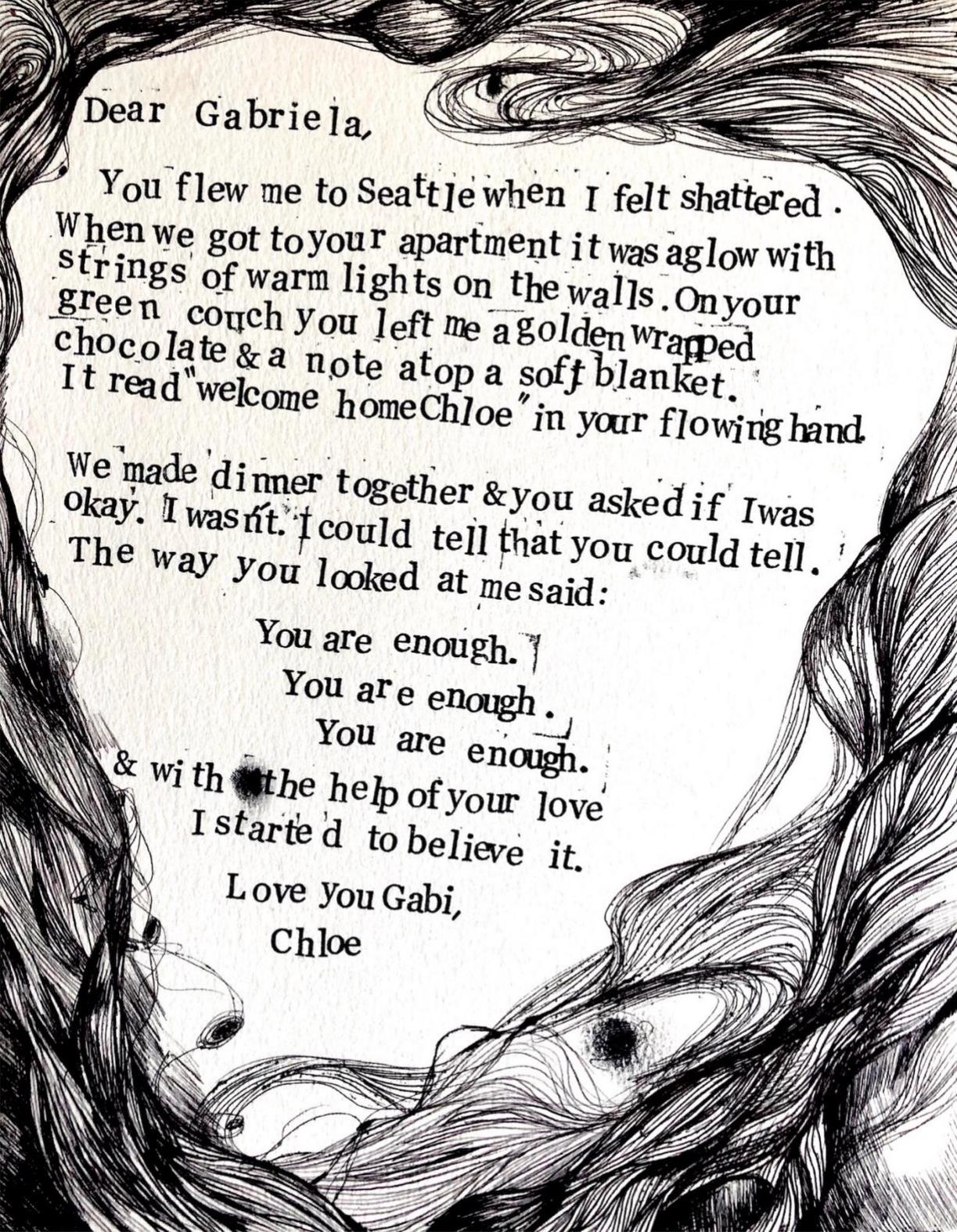
While not exactly a victory, you feel your spine begin to straighten, your chin tilt upward, and you take a deep breath. Exhaling, you realize that you've just gained a little bit of yourself back.

\*\*\*

Angela Miyuki Mackintosh is editor-in-chief of WOW! Women On Writing. She has been published in Vice, Red Fez, and The Nervous Breakdown, among others. She recently wrote the foreword to The Writer's Digest Guide to Magazine Writing. She's currently working on a memoir about grief, addiction and domestic violence, tentatively titled HIT. She lives in Los Angeles. [www.wow-womenonwriting.com](http://www.wow-womenonwriting.com)

Gabriela  
By Chloe Allred





Dear Gabriela,

You flew me to Seattle when I felt shattered .  
When we got to your apartment it was aglow with  
strings of warm lights on the walls . On your  
green couch you left me a golden wrapped  
chocolate & a note atop a soft blanket .  
It read "welcome home Chloe" in your flowing hand .

We made dinner together & you asked if I was  
okay . I was n't . I could tell that you could tell .  
The way you looked at me said :

You are enough .

You are enough .

You are enough .

& with the help of your love  
I started to believe it .

Love You Gabi,

Chloe

**In Reflection**  
**by Chloe J. Kander**

The day Megan got grounded, I became more than a reflection.

Megan sat in her parents' bedroom on their bed. Her mother and father stood before her, throwing words like "disgrace," "sickened," and "inexcusable," demanding tears from their offspring as sacrifice. I craved these confrontations because afterwards, Megan followed a very specific pattern. First, she would pray and plead not to go to hell of her family's religion. Then, she would stare into the mirror—sometimes for hours. Unlike most people who smiled, practiced speeches, and checked their teeth for crumbs, Megan studied her reflection, as if wondering who hid beneath her image. The connection she forged in those moments felt what I imagined life to be. So I paid close attention to this fight, already anticipating our staring interlude afterwards.

This confrontation was worse than the others. The booms from her father rattled the glass and the heat of her mother's sobs fogged my view. I listened more attentively. Apparently, a neighbor told Megan's parents about their daughter leaving a boy's house at midnight yesterday. Megan kept insisting all she had done was watch movies with her friends. It was the truth—I'd seen it from the glass of the posters' movie frames in the boy's basement. But her parents didn't listen. Instead, they demanded that Megan acknowledge what it looked like to the neighbors and to them.

"It's sinful," her mother whispered.

"It's an abomination!" Her father pounded his fist on the bureau. The mirror on top, my viewpoint to this familial battle, trembled.

Megan curled inward and I mimicked the motion dutifully. Her eyes stared at her denim shorts; my awareness focused on her and the scene. At any moment, she'd be dismissed, and her black hole of self-hatred would drive her to my reflection. But then, something miraculous happened. She peeked through her blonde hair curtain and found me in the bureau mirror behind her parents.

And we switched.

The switch was effortless, but the result was enormous. I've never felt so much. The warm breath of Megan's father enveloped my face as he leaned over and screamed. The stickiness from Megan's unfinished French toast breakfast tacked my pinching fingers together.

The bubbled fabric of the poorly made quilt bunched against Megan's short-clad legs. What I had felt before was nothing like this. Those stares in the mirror were empty. *This* was life.

"Well, what do you have to say?" her father asked.

After a significant pause, I realized I was the one expected to speak. Before the switch happened, Megan swore she knew how terrible her actions were and how horrible of a person that made her. So, I said much of the same thing.

"I'm sorry. I know I'm a bad person. But I promise I'll never do it again."

The words were right, but not the tone. Where Megan's voice leapt in pleading pitches and tore with odd staccatos, my speech was without inflection or variation. I could feel everything tangible Megan's world offered, but the intangible mess inside her body was too muted and too strange for me to understand. Her father kept waiting for me to show appropriate remorse, and I didn't realize then how to fake it. Only when her mother surmised that I, Megan, must be emotionally distressed to the point of numbness, did they dismiss me.

I walked into Megan's bedroom, relishing the weight of her step, the heat of her sweaty hair, and the sensation of air filling into her lungs—my lungs. But the moment I looked in the mirror and found Megan's frantic eyes staring back, we switched once again.

Megan avoided the mirror for a long time afterwards. It was an impressive feat, especially during her grounding, when she was confined to her bedroom at all times outside of school. It was only the whispered conversations on her phone and the tapped-out dialogues on her computer that let me know what her stares could not. She remembered our switch. She remembered her parents' condemnation as though she watched it on the television while I sat on the bed. And, with shameful pleasure, she remembered my emotional emptiness.

*It's better than feeling like an abomination*, she wrote in her journal by lamplight.

What I couldn't understand was if it felt so good, why did she kick me out? If I gave her what she secretly wanted, why did she avoid me now? I thought it was a perfect trade—life for me, hollowness for her. I didn't realize then Megan's value on empathy and sympathy. To me, these "virtues" were detrimental. And I couldn't comprehend why she would pray to an unseen god to become even more compassionate and understanding. She was a fool. She couldn't handle her own feelings, yet she took on the burden of others' emotions. Clearly, I was the solution to her decaying mind, but she refused to accept my help.

Megan shut me out for years. By her senior year in high school, she'd started looking in the mirror again like everyone else—to apply make-up, smile, and check her teeth for crumbs, pretending I didn't exist. She made it all the way to her second year of college without ever making a switch. She got a boyfriend, Derek, and a new best friend, her college roommate Kelly. She seemed set to live out her life like every other normal girl. But I didn't give up. At least, not at first. I did whatever I could to initiate a switch on my end, to taste the life I barely got to live once more. But no matter how much I stretched my essence, how often I screamed, or how hard I tried to pull her to me, nothing worked. After hundreds of tests and failures, I had to accept she held the power of invitation. Unless she called me back, my fate was to be nothing more than her reflection.

Then Megan and Kelly went to Canada for Megan's twentieth birthday to meet a group of their friends. Derek couldn't make it, but told her to have fun. Megan drank her first shot (which turned into eight shots) and woke up the next morning without a bra, undone pants, and a very pissed off Kelly—yelling that Megan had cheated on Derek. As I saw Megan's expression turn from confusion, to horror, to physical sickness from the glass in the hotel room's framed art, I knew—I *knew* my time had come.

“Wait... don't you remember any of this?” Kelly asked.

Megan turned away from her suddenly concerned friend, staggered into the fluorescent-lit bathroom, and threw up. She had thrown up several times the night before from her alcohol consumption (along with seven other people from her hotel-room party). But this time, the puke didn't come from poison in her body—it came from poison in her mind. Why else would she continue to retch when nothing came up? When she looked up to the mirror, her cheeks sunken and her eyes red and puffy, she was ready for my hollow and I was ready for her life.

We switched.

Megan's body was weak from dehydration and shaky from revelation. I did my best to rinse out the bile from my mouth, even swishing it with vodka when I could secure no mouthwash or toothpaste. I wiped my lips with the last square of toilet paper and walked back into the bedroom.

“Are you okay, Megan?” Kelly's voice was small, her fingers knotted together in her lap. “I'm sorry I yelled at you. We should call the police, or at least report it to the college when we get back. Jameson is in our book club, for Christ's sake.”

“I’d feel it, right?” I started reassembling Megan’s wardrobe as I talked to the frantic roommate. “If I lost my virginity, I’d feel it, right?” The knowledge of this truth was lost to both Megan and me. Her memories had been wiped away by vodka and Jägermeister, and the dim and blankets had obscured my reflected vision.

Kelly raised her eyebrows. “It’s still sexual assault. That’s a fucking crime, Megan.”

Megan’s emotions, which had been muted like our first switch, suddenly raged in my chest. I couldn’t understand them. To me, it felt like a force of nature thrashing the inside of my heart, lungs, and throat. My breaths became shallow—my chest throbbed as though wounded. In my desperation, I even attempted a switch by stealing a look to the framed painting of birds. No switch occurred, but something else did. Megan’s reflection wasn’t mimicking my sudden curled posture. Instead, she was shaking her head vigorously—her lips forming the word “no” over and over again.

“Can we just forget it happened?” I gasped. This was the right thing to say. Megan’s reflection quit acting out and fell into repeating my motions. And soon enough, the burning in my chest began to subside. I took a greedy gulp of air.

“Seriously? You’re going to let that asshole get away with this?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” And as Megan’s emotions dissolved away, practical information took its place to keep Megan’s life running smoothly. I knelt under the bed in an attempt to find Megan’s shoes. “Check out is in thirty minutes. Let’s get moving.”

On the drive back to Minnesota, I kept expecting Megan to interrupt my foray into her life. I cringed every time I accidentally caught Megan’s eyes in the hazy reflections of the passenger window, but Megan apparently didn’t want to talk to Kelly and made no attempt to switch. As such, I savored every piece of peppered beef jerky, sour cream potato chips, and gummy cherry candy I bought at the hotel vending machine with the quarters I found scattered around the hotel room. I absorbed the thrill of air rushing between my fingers as my hand caressed the wind outside the car window. As I kept adjusting the passenger air control from hot to cold, Kelly kept trying to revisit what had happened the night before. Apparently, Jameson—the attractive boy from the book club with a black belt in Tae Kwan Doe—had climbed into Megan’s bed shortly after she had thrown up for the fourth time. When the rest of the partygoers had left the room, Jameson had tried to have sex with Megan (to what extent he succeeded,

neither Kelly nor I know.) It was only when Kelly yelled at Megan that she was cheating on her boyfriend did Jameson pull out of the bed's blankets and leave.

"It's like the asshole forgot I was in the room," Kelly said.

I feel a faint thrumming in my chest. Since Kelly won't shut up about it, I try to focus the story on something more mundane. "I can't believe he kissed me after I threw up," I said, thinking about the horrible bile I had switched into. "How did he not get sick?"

"Okay, Megan, seriously, are you alright? You're acting all zombieified and weird."

"I'm fine." It was clear Kelly didn't believe me, but thankfully she shut up about it.

I spent the whole day in Megan's weak, but wonderfully alive body. Unfortunately, once we got home and I went into Megan's bathroom, Megan took over when I looked in the mirror above the sink. After that, she spent the rest of her night sobbing to her boyfriend Derek on the phone.

Thankfully, this event did not turn into a repeat of Megan's grounding. She didn't ignore me after. Instead, Megan switched the next morning when she woke up and saw my reflection on her cell phone screen. Essential bits of information came flooding into my consciousness—including her class schedule and homework assignments. But when I began to pack her schoolbag, the tremors and dissenting reflections came back. So I skipped her classes and spent the rest of the day investigating the various activities her campus apartment had to offer, including television, music, video games, and the vast amount of food in her refrigerator. It was wonderful. Only after I ate two rows of Oreos and poured myself a glass of water did Megan switch back, after I saw her reflection in my cup.

The next day, she switched during a lecture after a classmate leaned over to ask a question. One reflected glare from his glasses, and suddenly I was doodling in the margins of Megan's Shakespeare notes. There were a few patterns to these switches. They happened most often when Kelly was in the room, or when an unknown boy tried to talk to Megan. But sometimes, they would happen for no discernable reason, and I would suddenly find myself eating lunch, watching a movie, or flossing my teeth.

The only time she consistently stayed herself was when she was with her boyfriend, Derek. Derek had an apartment full of framed music posters and glass knick-knacks that would have made a switch easy from any spot. But despite Derek's accusing questions and their many

sobbing fights, she never withdrew from him. I couldn't understand why until she finally told me (or herself) in the bathroom mirror.

"He doesn't believe me." Megan's voice was barely audible over the showerhead's stream of the hot water, slowly fogging up the glass. "I've got to make him believe me."

Before the fog took over, she made the switch. But instead of following the simple instructions left in my mind to shower, I decided to try and help. Emotions couldn't actually hurt a person, I rationalized—I would just suffer through if the pounding in my chest returned. So I skipped the shower, went to her room, and grabbed her cellphone. I pulled up Derek's contact information. I pressed the send button and held the phone to my ear, ready to cut him out of Megan's life—our life. When she was with him, she withered our body away. And I wouldn't allow her mistakes to affect my share in her existence.

The moment Derek's voice came through the speaker, the painful thrumming began. I took deep breaths, trying to breathe through Megan's anxious emotions the way an article online had suggested. But the moment Derek said, "Hello" and I said, "Derek, listen," Megan's emotions didn't pound—they shredded. The muted feelings overwhelmed my mind at a high-pitched screaming frequency. I dropped the phone to the floor and my body followed shortly thereafter. Tears leaked from my eyes and rasps tore from my throat. This was nothing like the hotel room from before. This was worse. So much worse. It completely overwhelmed my senses and my mind and I knew I had only two choices: stop breathing or switch.

With extreme effort, I grabbed the phone, ended the call, and looked at Megan's furious reflection once the screen went dark. Megan took over and immediately called Derek back. He didn't yell, but he didn't show compassion, empathy, or any of the virtues she prayed for so fervently in her own life. I didn't understand why she needed him, but I knew I could make no objections—not if I wanted to live.

I was forced to watch Megan's devolution from the reflections of Derek's music posters. When Derek gripped her arms too tightly as he demanded the "truth," I would deal with bruises the next morning. When Derek's incessant questions made her stomach clench, I would deal with hunger pains in the middle of the night. It was no wonder she was constantly sick with colds and flus, considering how poorly she treated her body. But I didn't know how to make her stop. I didn't know how to make her see just how bad our life had become.

That all changed when Derek broke her.

Megan and Derek were messing around one night after a long conversation about their relationship and future. I watched her from the Doors poster by Derek's living room sofa and later, the Van Halen poster by his bed. Bit by bit, Megan lost her clothes. This was nothing new. Megan had a strict rule for no sex before marriage, but she was open for anything else. I didn't see how doing everything beyond penetration still made her pure, but Megan's emotional mind has never made sense to me.

Derek pulled away and said, "Are you ready?"

"Ready for what?" Megan asked, her voice breathy and hot.

And then it happened. In one violent stroke.

Megan screamed so loud that the glass on the Van Halen poster trembled. She pushed Derek off and ran down the hall. When she got to the bathroom, a thick trail of red already reached her toes. She locked the door and sat on the toilet once she realized she was staining the bathroom rug. I saw everything clearly from the wall-sized mirror across the toilet. I saw her go through an entire roll of toilet paper. I saw her tremble so hard her teeth chattered. I saw her pray and whisper over and over again to her unseen god, "This doesn't count, right? I'm still a virgin, right?" And finally, *finally*, when Derek knocked on the door, Megan made the switch and let me in.

I sat on the toilet seat for a long time, curling over in the worst tangible pain I had ever felt. Once, I had cut off a small portion of Megan's finger pad when slicing an apple. The raw and red lower epidermis stung like fire in the air and didn't stop hurting until the pain medication kicked in thirty minutes later. Even then, the finger still throbbed, as though crying for its lost skin. This was much like that, only it was my entire body crying for whatever was torn apart inside of me. I couldn't stop bleeding. I couldn't stop shaking. I wished I could just bandage it, take pain medication, and go home. But I was in Derek's bathroom, naked. I couldn't call anyone; Megan's cellphone was in her jacket. I certainly couldn't run or fight in this condition. Unless I wanted to starve to death, I had to open the door sometime.

So I did.

Derek stumbled in, also still naked, and knelt on the bathroom floor.

"Please, forgive me." I could barely understand his words through his hiccupping sobs. "You can break up with me. You *should* break up with me. Just... *please*, forgive me."

He said this over and over, like Megan's prayers to her unseen god. I cocked my head, realizing Megan was right. Derek hadn't believed she was still a virgin. And now that he was witnessing visceral proof, he couldn't handle it. I looked up to the mirror for a cue, and found Megan holding her hands over her mouth, crying, looking as lost as I've ever seen her. My chest hummed, hinting at an onslaught of feelings I would not be able to handle. So I did the only thing I could think of to calm down her reflection and emotions.

I smoothed Derek's hair and said, "I love you."

It was like I shot him. He keeled forward and everything. But instead of dropping to the ground in death, he crushed my body against his and replaced his pleas for forgiveness into promises of affection. "I love you too, Megan. God, I love you so much. You know I would never hurt you, right? I love you. I love you."

Eventually, he brought me Megan's clothes. Once I stopped bleeding enough to make it home with a wad of toilet paper in my underwear, I left.

Megan never switched back after that. But she kept watching.

I went to her classes. I watched TV with Kelly. I made dates to with Derek. We even had sex a few more times, although I could never fake the appropriate emotion necessary to give him comfort. When Derek dumped me one night via text, I froze—certain Megan would tear into me. But she didn't. She stayed in her reflection. And kept watching.

After the semester ended, it seemed she would never switch back. So I started to take chances—I started to live our life the way I wanted it. I changed her major from English to communications to learn appropriate conversation. I dropped Kelly and all Megan's friends from high school, and made new acquaintances that never questioned my emotional distance. When Megan's parents called, I ignored them completely as I knew I would never be able to appropriately fake Megan's perfect persona. When they threatened to stop paying for school unless I came home for Christmas, I went out and found a part-time job and a cheap apartment off campus. The rest of my tuition was covered by scholarships and student loans. It was my biggest change to Megan's life to-date, but still she did not make the switch. It was then I stopped calling my existence a part of her life—this world, this body, was now mine.

It wasn't until after I graduated college and got a job in insurance that I started to feel my chest rumble. It would happen when my mother left a voicemail or when an old high school friend tried to befriend me on social media. The days that happened, I simply deleted the

messages and the pounding in my chest eventually would go away. And if it didn't, I covered up all my mirrors and glassy objects until she gave up.

I know she wants to come out, but she's scared. Scared of messing everything up again. And she should be. This is for the best. I'm better at living her life.

She's better at being the reflection.

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Chloe J. Kander is the pseudonym for an author slowly learning how to be brave with her words. One day, she might put a face with her voice. For now, she's happy to at least have the courage to speak.

**Guest Educator**  
**by Cathy Warner**

“I heard that your period will burn if you eat salsa.”

“My aunt said if you drink Coke when you’re pregnant, the baby will come out with hiccups.”

Eight ten-year-old girls sit with me in a stuffy classroom on a July morning in the Sacramento Valley. All are daughters of migrant workers harvesting peaches in nearby orchards. The year is 1982. Herpes is the big incurable sexually transmitted disease, and I—twenty-one, a newlywed—am a guest speaker in the classroom.

Their teacher has taken the handful of boys outside to play basketball while I show the girls diagrams of their reproductive organs, explaining how they work and saying, gently, that their aunts, cousins, and grandmothers are wrong.

Come September my volunteer work as an educator with Planned Parenthood will take me to high school biology classes where I talk about reproductive anatomy and physiology, birth control and abstinence, pregnancy and STD’s. I do not hand out bananas and condoms. “No,” I say, “you can’t get pregnant from swallowing semen.” “Yes, you have to wear a new condom every time.”

If the classroom teachers step outside, students are freer with their questions. If the teachers stay during the Q&A, most of the questions are asked for shock value. I am unshockable.

Unlike the classroom teachers who know their students and who have formed opinions of them, and who may or may not want to consider them sexual beings, I don’t know these teenagers and I’ll never see them again.

Likewise, these teens don’t have an opinion about me, won’t be grossed out speculating how I know these things. I will answer any question, tell them anything they want to know, whether they ask raising hands during class, question me while I gather up my overhead transparencies, or casually lean against the wall stopping me when I walk out the door. Sex is my field.

I could say I’m speaking in classrooms and staffing information tables on behalf of Planned Parenthood because my parents, like most, couldn’t include the names of their children

and the word “sex” in the same sentence and I believe everyone should have information and options, even if they don’t have occasion to use them.

Or I could say that if it hadn’t been for Planned Parenthood, I—a collegebound girl in love—would’ve been a teen pregnancy statistic.

I could say those things, and they’d be true, but not the whole truth. I volunteer to talk about developing bodies and sexual relationships because in my professional life sex is a weapon used to gain power and control, men are perpetrators, and women are victims, ashamed of their bodies.

My job title is Personal Safety Educator and each afternoon I am buzzed into a small office in the cinder-block bunker that houses the university police department. I spend my days answering phones, writing newsletters, and reading account after horrific account of sexual violence.

I give presentations to college students and campus staff members, telling women that one in three of them will be assaulted in their lifetimes. I demonstrate how to carry keys with the shafts protruding between their knuckles (the way I do every day) so they can jab an attacker’s eyes or rake his face. I show them a televised interview of a reporter after she was raped and slashed with a utility knife, one of the first women to go public with her story.

I make charts, continuums of violence, from sexual harassment (a term that has just been coined) on one end to rape on the other. I write thinly veiled scenarios from my own life, my sister’s, my friends’ to rank along the sexual assault scale, still feeling guilty that I outran a would-be assailant when others aren’t that lucky, that I refused my stepfather who left me alone but not my sister.

I photocopy quizzes about sexual assault, hand them out in dorm lounges, staff break-rooms and classrooms, and repeat key phrases: *No always means no. No woman ever asks to be raped.*

The people who hang around after these presentations do not ask easily answered questions about sex. Instead they say, “It happened to me.”

“My boyfriend locked me in his car...”

“It was my stepfather.... My mother still doesn’t know.”

“This guy followed me into the parking lot...”

Their stories, unlike the ones my boss has me read, aren't confined to pages of journals featuring anonymous victims I do not picture.

Here are college students and employees reaching for my hand, whispering, sometimes crying. They could be my sister, my mother, my grandmother. I listen, nod, tell them about the self-defense classes on campus, and provide referral slips to the counseling center and crisis hotline, but here I am not unshockable. My eyes burn, my stomach knots, I develop headaches. I stumble away from the talks carrying their stories along with my papers, simmering their emotions with my own grief and fear for years until motherhood brings the necessary catalyst for healing my old wounds and claiming my own power.

One day, I will think of these women who shared their stories as survivors, not victims. One day, I will think of myself that way, too. For, I am simply the guest educator.

Armed with my hour presentation I will raise my voice in the 450-seat lecture hall and shout out the myths and facts about rape so everyone can hear. Later, on my own time, I will slip into a child's desk and talk with middle-school girls about breasts and bras and menstrual pads.

I hope something I say to someone, anyone, makes a speck of difference in her life.

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Cathy Warner is a poet, writer, teacher, editor, home renovator and real estate broker who lives on the shores of Washington's Hood Canal. She's authored two books of poetry *Home By Another Road* (2019), and *Burnt Offerings* (2014), and her fiction, short memoir, and essays have appeared in dozens of print journals and online venues including *Under the Sun*, *The Other Journal*, *So To Speak*, *Water~Stone*, and the blogs of *Ruminate*, *Relief*, and *Image*. She is represented in several anthologies, most recently *This Side of the Divide* (2019). Recipient of the Steinbeck and SuRaa fiction awards, Cathy has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best American Essays. Find her at [cathywarner.com](http://cathywarner.com).

## **The Prisoner's Love Song** **by Julia C. Spring**

My mother used to sing, “Oh, I wish I had someone to love me, someone to call me ‘my own,’ for I have a sad story to tell you, a story that’s never been told.”

I imagine her crooning along with “The Prisoner's Love Song” on the Victrola when she was in her teens, the late 1920’s. She, Janet, was a solid girl with thick dark brown hair, bangs straight across her forehead. She was sociable and bright, a student at the school within the teaching college her father headed. She was also lonely, living with her parents and an imaginary friend, Acme (pronounced 'Acum') Jones in large rooms without much furniture, far north near New York's border with Quebec.

I hardly noticed her “Prisoner’s Love Song” when I was a child because she sang it so often, along with another: “when you wake up in the morning and you find the bedclothes wet, blame the baaaby, blame the baaaby.” These fragments were part of our family background noise. One of my sisters hummed when she ate, and I remember a baritone drone from my father. My husband and daughter have told me that I also make noises, filling space, staving off anxiety. I sometimes clear my throat in a way that drives people next to me crazy. I’ve mostly driven it underground, so it has transmogrified into a gesture, a semaphore that I make with my fingers. This is more public than throat-clearing, so maybe I should change back.

My mother never did sing her personal prisoner’s love song to me—I don’t think she even remembered it--but she did pass it on to me: the story of her father molesting her when she was a child. She passed the molestation on to me as well; her father, my grandfather, molested me for a year starting when I was three. For a long time I thought my scattered memories of this weren’t true. Then a friend pointed out that I have lots of other early memories that I trust. Since then I have believed myself about what happened.

So my mother’s sad story is mine, too. When I was molested by my Grampa, her Daddy, I did not tell her. Thirty years later what he had done to me catapulted out of amnesia. I sat down and wrote in little-girl language paragraphs that alternated between telling what he did/I felt and trying to decide whether or not to tell my mother. I decided not to.

That was good judgment for a little girl. When I did tell my mother three decades later, she said she was glad not to have known because she would have had to pretend it hadn’t

happened, to treat her father the same as ever. Another time she asked about molestation, “Isn’t that what fathers do to daughters?” So it is my pretty good guess that when her father molested her, she un-knew it; the events slipped from her conscious mind and were never recovered. She lived her life, and his, acting as though her father were only an innocent man.

Here’s my idea of Janet’s sad story. There were bats in their attic when she was a child. She was terrified of them and screamed whenever one flew into her room on a summer night. Her father came to the rescue, caught it and drowned it in a pail of water kept on the landing for this purpose.

While the bat struggled to its death under the bucket lid, Janet would huddle in her bed, covers tight over her head. Her father would sit next to her and pull the sheet down slowly, stroke her hair, find her nightgown scrunched up over her little girl hips, pull it up gently, stroke her there too. He breathed fast. She, not moving, loved and hated this special attention she got from her father that started out comforting and became frightening.

When her father finished and went back to the bedroom he shared with her mother — after all, it took a long time to calm their daughter down after each bat capture—Janet was relieved, but had trouble going back to sleep. The next day it would seem unreal: had her daddy really done that to her? If he had, how could he be his usual self at breakfast, paunchy and quiet, with a low chuckle? It was better to pretend nothing had happened, and after all, maybe it hadn’t...?? Janet would decide not to scream the next time there was a bat, but she always did.

I look at what I just wrote and see that I have euphemisms, ellipses, I can’t or don’t tell all the sexual part clearly. Well, of course, it’s my mother’s story, how can I know everything for sure? But if I remember all the details from my own story, am I willing to write them down? We shall see.

The summer after my grandmother, Janet’s mother, died, Grampa was with our family on vacation in New Hampshire. We were staying in a weathered lakefront house with deep porches and a rough boathouse.

My sisters, seven and ten, had their beds on a second floor sleeping porch built around a big tree. I, at three, was deemed too young to sleep there. My parents’ bedroom was also on the second floor.

My memory is that Grampa and I were on the first floor in adjoining rooms, separated by a French door. My mother, Janet, didn't want her father to be alone, but she didn't want to be near him either, fearful that she would have to take too much care of him now that he was a widower. Was that really how the rooms were arranged? Certainly wherever he and I slept was far away from my parents, sleeping their deep vacation sleep behind their closed bedroom door.

One Sunday the rest of the family went to church, leaving the oldest and youngest at home. I was in red shorts and a white t-shirt, with curly blond hair that everyone said was just like my father's as a child. I prepared a tea party for Grampa and me on a big rock in the yard. He lumbered down from his rocking chair on the porch. The perfect hostess, I poured from my pretend tea pot. We picked up the leaf and flower cookies from their pebble plates and nibbled peacefully.

Then we walked to the boathouse, hand in hand. Grampa was short with a belly under his hiked-up belt, but it was still a long way for me to see his face. He had a little smile playing around his mouth that made me feel loved. He lifted me to look through the dusty window, and then we went inside, where I was only allowed to go with a grownup.

In the dim cobwebby boathouse, next to the old rowboat, things change between Grampa and me. My back is pressed against the wall next to oars, a broom. His brown tweed trousers are bumping against my left cheek, banging that eye closed.

With my right eye I look out through knotholes and cracks at the fuzzy green and yellow summer light, but I can't escape the rough wool poking into me, rubbing against my cheek. Is he angry at me, grunting and pushing this way? I keep focused on the light dancing through the walls, reminding me there is another world beyond Grampa and me in the boathouse.

We must have gone back into the sunshine, to the rock, the porch. My family must have come back from church, we ate, napped, swam, ate again. Surely I was, as usual, put to bed earlier than I wanted, before the sun set.

Even though Grampa scared me, something special had happened between us. I didn't tell my mother. I had a lot of tangled reasons not to. I don't think Grampa told me to be quiet but I knew I should keep my mouth shut. If I told, the new bond between Grampa and me would be over almost before it had begun. I knew mother would not believe me and be very angry at me for lying,--maybe even angrier than Grampa had been while he was grunting and pressing his

brown tweed trousers against me. Is it possible she was somehow jealous, too? And what words did my preschooler-self know to use?

The rest of that vacation, when I was put to bed, I'd hear the rest of the family up and about as I lay in my white sheets and nightgown, body and hair clean after a day in water and sun. My sisters would go to their porch, my parents to their room, Grampa to his. In my little room I listened to him in his big one next to mine, with his big bed, big belly and big snore. I heard him pee in the chamber pot. I liked being near him, but I wished Mommy and Daddy were close too.

Some nights, Grampa comes into my room, sits down on the edge of the bed and begins to rub my back. I pretend to be asleep, keeping my eyes squinched shut as he slides the sheet off me to where my nightgown has ruckled up around my waist. He touches my bottom, slides his hand around on it and even between my legs, to my secret wet spot that no one but me has ever touched. His arm feels very long, long as a seven-foot snake, so that even though his hand is between my legs he seems very far away. His grunts are faint but still I am scared.

Sometime that summer Mommy in her long white nightgown throws me in my long white nightgown onto my little bed. She is very angry at me and I know it has to do with Grampa and me, but she does not seem to be mad at him.

A year later, when I was four, my family had moved from a suburb of Boston to one of Seattle, living in a new apartment building surrounded by asphalt and dirt. All spring we watched the Caterpillar tractors move the mud next to us for a new building and then beyond it, another.

That summer Grampa came across the country to visit, staying in an apartment my parents had borrowed for him. I was excited to have him arrive; Mommy and I showed him the sights on the way home from the train station. We ate some lunch and took him to his place. I was eager to show him the bathroom towels I had picked out for him.

I am alone with Grampa after Mommy goes downstairs. I twirl around in a lavender dress, surely a hand-me-down, with grapes and vines and leaves embossed around the hem. I want to show that special embossing to my grandfather, have him feel the bumpy fabric. He touches it, his face chuckly with me.

But his hands do not stay on the hem. He grasps my waist under my dress above my white cotton underpants, and lifts me onto his lap right on those scratchy trousers, spreading my

full skirt out across both our legs. His arms hold me tightly against his paunch and chest. I can feel his warm breath exhale harshly as he grunts into my curls. My heart beats fast. I want to stay on his lap and I want to escape.

I feel like two little girls inside and outside my dress, split right at the waist. Above it I am a well-behaved four year old with blond hair dressed up for my Grampa in lavender puffed sleeves. I look down at the spread-out skirt with its embossing, my feet in lace-up shoes and white socks at the end of my dangling legs. Everything looks normal, just like me, the Jujie my family loves.

But underneath that embossing, a ferocious storm is wreaking havoc. It is my chaos as well as his rough movement that I feel, that I remember. Something is happening to and in my body that both excites and terrifies me. How can I be two little girls at the same time, one so good and one so bad? Are the girl I can see (skirt, legs, shoes and socks) and the one I can feel so strongly under that skirt, really attached, really one, me? I rub the embossing on the dress between my fingers, over and over, while Grampa pushes against me. The little lavender bumps comfort me, remind me of the world out there, one of sisters and naps and kindergarten starting in the fall. I will get that world back soon if I just hold still and wait for Grampa to be done with me.

The next summer, Grampa again came to visit, this time with his new wife Gracia. We took them on tours of the Seattle area and they took us to restaurants my parents couldn't afford. My mother was anxious to be a good hostess but I could tell she didn't really like her stepmother and didn't want me to either. I wasn't sure—Gracia smelled of lavender, had soft skin and wore a necklace of glass iridescent bubbles that fascinated me. Still, I vaguely missed my special relationship with my grandfather, who never touched me that way again. My memories disappeared into amnesia, imprisoned until they burst out of me thirty years later and I began the process of acknowledging what he had done to me. I felt, still feel, thanks to Gracia for rescuing me.

\*\*\*

Julia C. Spring is a lawyer/social worker specializing in adult guardianship and mental health law. When her professional articles started becoming more personal, she began to write short memoir pieces, which have been published in journals including Touch, Hospital Drive, and Persimmon Tree. She was a prize winner in The Intima's 2018 Compassion in Healthcare Essay Contest.

*\*The Prisoner's Love Song* first appeared in print in *Oasis Journal* 2016.

**a letter to myself, to read each morning**  
**by Hope D. Weidemann**

You will be whole again.

Crying will stop being a daily task

Kindness will replace this strife

and every scar that has made a home of your body.

The fear will fleet.

Peace will arrive.

Laughter will abound.

Sad days will be sad days.

They will stop multiplying into months.

Things will be okay

and you will believe it.

I know today,

“things” begs more detail.

I mean:

you will not panic at the sound of his name.

You will feel more survivor than victim.

You will stop blaming yourself

and learn to dismiss being discounted.

You will put down these weights

because he never had the right to give them to you.

Everything will have its season.

This winter will end.

Hold tight, please.

Trust.

You will be whole again.

\*\*\*

Hope D. Weidemann is from York, Pennsylvania. She comes from a family of seven, with that number fluctuating due to their active role as a foster family. She is currently a student at Penn State University, pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Hope began writing in second grade after her younger sister became terminally ill. She has continued writing as a way of presenting her experiences in a way that other's may be able to relate in hopes that they will not faces the loneliness that she did. Her most recent works center around her experience being assaulted and its ripple effects. She believes that human connection is born in the ability to say, "I know how you feel."

**Cleanse Away the Dirt**  
**by Melissa Kelly**

When the dirt left behind  
Embeds into your soul  
Despite the scalding showers  
It's stays stagnant within  
When the pain and rage  
Building inside expands  
punishing innocent bystanders  
It's a self-destructive path  
Leading to nowhere  
But isolation and hate  
We fall and hit bottom  
We learn and we grow  
Then rise higher than he  
Who put the hurt there  
That dirt there  
He stays at that low point  
We understand that self love  
With the power of forgiveness  
Can let go of the pain and hate  
And cleanse away the dirt

\*\*\*

Melissa Kelly is a poet and short story writer from Long Island, NY. You can see some of her work in WestWard Quarterly Magazine, Plum Tree Tavern, Soft Cartel, Hedge Apple and Amethyst Review.

**you (me, us)**  
**by Eddy Funkhouser**

I just learned about you

but you've become my shadow  
your assault in the image of mine  
influenced by my experience

I was unaware of your existence

but your ordeals were mine  
before they were yours  
not to be possessive— as much as I don't want to share  
the trauma, I'm here to share the healing

I do not know you

but I know your story  
an echo of my own  
I heard the blow-by-blow account  
of what happened to you (to me, us)  
and my stomach felt empty and  
nauseous, both at once  
I could predict the next act that you did not  
consent to, before it was told to me  
my body ached in the places  
you (me, us) were hurt

I do not know your name

but forgive me  
a reported rapist might become  
a jailed rapist might become  
held from offending again  
had I intercepted your abuse  
snatched it from the air before  
it could settle onto your shoulders  
I'm sorry despite  
knowing that what happened to you (me, us)  
isn't, wasn't my fault

I have never met you  
but thank you

for turning in our mutual rapist  
when I didn't, couldn't  
for impeding yet another  
repetition of our pain  
for reminding me that it was real, that it was wrong, that I (you, we) deserve justice  
for seeking the reparation  
we deserve to heal

I cannot find you, talk to you, cry with you  
but I believe you (me, us)

**swamp monster**  
**by Eddy Funkhouser**

when it happens in 2009 you wonder  
you wonder if it was  
quite right  
quite appropriate  
quite consensual

being drunk  
being reckless  
not physically resisting  
you must have consented

you tamp it all way down  
bury the monster  
with mounds of sex  
(definitely consensual sex) (definitely bad sex)

the legality changes in 2013  
the federal definition of rape updates  
for the first time in eighty years

the new definition is  
*“penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with anybody part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.”*

the United States recognizes that  
rape doesn't have to be “violent”  
they don't know all rape is violent  
the Department of Justice removes  
the word “forcible”  
the phrase “against her will”

in the announcement the Department of Justice writes  
*“a victim can be incapacitated and thus unable to consent because of ingestion of drugs or alcohol... Physical resistance is not required on the part of the victim to demonstrate lack of consent.”*

you read about the updated definition in your feminism class  
underneath the mounds of sex  
(definitely consensual sex) (definitely bad sex)  
something awakens  
a swamp monster arises from the depths  
shedding layers of algae and condoms and duckweed

she stands up and dwarfs the wetland  
dwarfs the last four years  
dwarfs your conviction that you are okay  
she starts screaming  
she doesn't stop

you finally consider for a moment  
that you were assaulted  
that you were raped  
that a monster was birthed in you  
she won't stop screaming

you try to keep the course  
bury her in sex  
(definitely consensual sex) (definitely bad sex)  
rebuild the layers  
to blanket the swamp monster  
suffocate her in sweaty sheets  
at least muffle the screaming

the screaming intensifies

you tell someone  
you say rape  
your friends already know  
they were waiting for you

now you want to scream so you do  
and you and the swamp monster scream together  
neither of you stops

sometimes one or both of you takes a breath to tell your therapist about 2009  
sometimes one or both of you quiets a little  
sometimes one or both of you stops screaming  
sometimes one or both of you whimpers a little

the swamp monster is still here but not as loud  
not buried in sex  
(definitely consensual sex) (definitely bad sex)

you're not friends but not enemies either  
sometimes one or both of you nods to the other on the street as you pass  
acquaintances bound together by shared screaming

\*\*\*

Eddy Funkhouser is a queer non-binary urban farmer and garden educator living in San Francisco, CA. Their work can be found in Dirty Girls Literary Magazine, Stonewall's Legacy, Beyond Bloodlines, and Written on the Body.

**Jane Doe 1**  
**by Jacqueline M. Regan**

They were everywhere. From all sides long arms reached out their tentacles to grab a piece of my flesh and squeeze. Terrified, I attempted to walk backwards running one hand along the row of lockers to guide me and with the other, slapping away the hands of four eighth grade boys.

Every day, as I got my books from the locker, these boys pushed each other into me or tripped and fell on me as an excuse to grope me. Now, they advanced toward me like some kind of boy-monster with eight arms and laughter escaping from four sets of sharp teeth. I was losing the battle, when the 7<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher, Mr. West, came out of his classroom and yelled, “What is going on here?” The boys froze. “What are you boys doing? Do you think she is just a piece of meat?! Get out of here, NOW.” I was relieved and started to walk away, trailing behind the boys, until he stopped me. “You, wait a minute,” his face red with anger and disgust. “Why are you letting them treat you this way? Don’t you realize that you are encouraging them?”

One of the boys deciding that it was hilarious that I had been referred to as a piece of meat, nicknamed me “rump roast.” I was no longer called by my first name, but I was a lip-smacking piece of flesh, meant to be devoured. Although I spent the rest of junior high dodging these boys, I tried hard not to “encourage” them. I never wore make-up or dressed in a manner that my mother would refer to as looking like a “street-walker,” so I wasn’t sure how I was causing this problem, as Mr. West had accused me of doing, but I knew that somehow it was my fault.

I had been indoctrinated in seeing myself as an object from a young age. From second grade to seventh grade, the pastor of my parish had assaulted me. The teachers and principal at my school and the housekeeper and other priests at the rectory must have all known because he took me out of school whenever the urge hit him. No one made any effort to stop him, and I stayed quiet.

But in the early nineties, accusations of abusive priests exploded in the media and people were believing the victims. When talking about the news with my younger sister, she asked me, “Why didn’t you ever do anything about it?”

“I never realized that I could,” I responded.

Picking up the phone, I felt powerful as I dialed SNAP, Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests, but my voice cracked as I told the man who had answered the phone my story. In a soothing and sympathetic voice, he validated my experience and offered to help me with anything I needed. He gave me the number of a lawyer in New York, since this is where the assault took place. I called.

This is when I became Jane Doe 1. The first time I saw myself referred to in this way, as I read the legal complaint, the severity of what had occurred hit me and for the first time, I was enraged.

*Defendant EDWARDS was ordained a Roman Catholic priest. The allegations of childhood sexual abuse and/or negligence forming the basis for this complaint took place in the State of New York. Plaintiff is of the information and belief that EDWARDS was assigned by the defendant ARCHDIOCESE to St. Andrew’s Parish Church. It was during this assignment, from approximately 1969 to 1986, that defendant EDWARDS sexually abused plaintiff [Jane Doe 1].*

*The tasks in which EDWARDS was engaged at the time he sexually abused plaintiff [Jane Doe 1] were administrative, authorized by the ARCHDIOCESE, and concerned the supervision of children. Upon information and belief, EDWARDS knew that it was the policy and the practice of the ARCHDIOCESE not to discipline priests who sexually abused children and to cover up instances of such abuse and relied upon that policy and practice in engaging in sexually abusive conduct.*

I asked myself, how did Edwards know he could get away with his behavior? Why didn't anyone report him. Did the Archdiocese just say, "Hey it's okay to abuse children as long as you stay a priest?" That didn't make sense. But then I remembered one of the times I had come to see Father Edwards after school, and Father Paul was waiting for me instead.

"Father Edwards told me he would be late and that I should entertain you. Come with me."

I followed him down the hallway, past the rectory offices, to his bedroom. It was small. He was the newest and youngest priest, so he didn't have a living room, bedroom, and office like Fr. Edwards.

The dim yellow walls of the room made it ugly, but it was neat. The orangey brown bedspread on his bed was tight and wrinkle free. "Do you have to make your own bed?" I asked.

"No, Edith does it."

"You are so lucky! What a life, she makes all your meal and cleans up after you. What do you do?" I asked.

He laughed and walked over to his door and kicked the doorstop so it would remain open. Father Edwards always kept his door shut tight. There were no chairs, so he motioned for me to sit on his bed with him.

At 11 years-old, I had not mastered the art of conversation, and although Father Paul was nice and tried to ask all the right questions, we mostly sat in silence.

Then, he said, "I heard you were very ticklish." The word started my body trembling, and I couldn't hold back my giggles. He smiled, relieved for some sound to break the oppressive silence. Then he pushed me down onto the bed and began to tickle me. Panic gripped me, and I shot up and off of the bed. This is how it started with Fr. Edwards.

His shocked expression told me he knew something was wrong. He began to apologize, but he didn't ask me what was wrong, and he got me out of his room as quickly as possible. I don't remember what happened next.

A few months later, Father Paul left the priesthood. My mother said that he was lonely, and that Father Edwards had encouraged him to bond with some children, so he felt like he had a family, like Father Edwards did. But it hadn't worked.

*EDWARDS abused [Jane Doe 1] on a weekly or bi weekly basis. The abuse took place in the Rectory at St. Andrew's where EDWARDS would meet her after school or if he could not see her after school, he would take her to lunch. Occasionally, EDWARDS would take [Jane Doe 1] on trips to Rye, Playland. When EDWARDS vacationed with [Jane Doe 1]'s family, he would abuse [Jane Doe 1] at the house while the rest of the family was at the beach.*

Cape Cod. 1976. It was the bicentennial. A new quarter had been issued and art work appeared all over town. The opening to the underpass on the main road had been decorated with a bicentennial flag on one side and the current flag on the other. It was going to be an

exciting 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Each summer, our family rented a cottage on the Cape. This year, we were going to rent a house. It was an extravagance, but Father Edwards, Sister Beatrice, and two girls from the parish were coming to the Cape with us. They were staying with some of Father Edwards' friends, but would spend their days at the beach with us.

We rented surreys one day. I insisted, in front of everyone, that I go with Sister Beatrice and Tara. I did not want to be with Father Edwards. My mother gave me a mean look, which meant I would be in trouble later, but I didn't care. I knew she couldn't make me do it with so many people around.

Our surrey flipped, and I fell right on my face. Split my lip open. Cut my head. Blood in the sand. Pain in my lip. Sand in my lip. Hands from everywhere reached in and pulled me out of the crash. Inside the nearest restaurant, the waitress gave me ice. Tara stayed with me while Sister got my family. My mother cried out, "Your pretty face." My father carried me back to the house.

I was getting lots of attention, and they let me rest. This meant I was safe, alone.

Then, my mother dragged me out of my bed. "Mom, please. I'm tired." My lip was throbbing, and I couldn't eat. "Father Edwards wants to see you, and he is going to say a prayer for you," she replied.

Then, I lay on the couch in the living room, and everyone watched as he said prayers for my speedy recovery.

Two days later, I went to the beach with everyone. I still had a giant bandage on my lip and forehead, but I was told that fresh air would be good for me. Father Edwards needed to go to the bathroom back at the house. He decided to take me for a walk with him. He held my hand as we walked down the sandy road. I loved the smoky wood smell and the pine trees. I used to love the Cape.

When we got to the house, the door was locked. I was relieved.

"I guess we have to go back," I said.

"Hmmm. Maybe we can get in a window." He found a window in the back that he worked on until he could get it open. He picked me up and put me in the window and told me to open the front door. I weaved through the rooms to the front door and opened it for him. He picked me up and carried me to the bedroom. When he was done, we walked back to the beach. No one even asked why we were gone so long.

*The abuse continued until she left St. Andrew's in the 8th grade. As a result of the abuse, [Jane Doe 1] has experienced pain and suffering. She has experienced difficulties with intimate relationships, often finding physical contact horrifying. Her relationships have tended to be long and "safe" with no real attachment or emotion. She has survived various self-destructive behaviors including drinking and drugs and scratching herself to make sure that she can feel. She endures persistent and chronic depression for which she has received therapy.*

This description reads like a textbook description of what sexual abuse does to a person. Being Jane Doe 1 places me firmly among a large group who have suffered the consequences of being female and powerless. Unfortunately, when bringing my lawsuit to the state of New York, it could not be pursued because of the statute of limitations on sexual abuse. At the time, the law required that a victim must report within three years of his or her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This statute does not consider the way society has conditioned women to believe that we are at fault or the ways

we are silenced. But I had finally found my voice, and I no longer cared if no one believed me. They were going to have to listen to me.

The Archdiocese of New York offered an Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program last year for victims of abuse. My lawyers helped me prepare my claim and although I was awarded a monetary award, or blood money, I never received an apology from the archdiocese. But I don't need it anymore because I have been heard.

After repeated defeats, on February 14, 2019, the New York State Legislation passed the Child Victims Act. Survivors and supporters had been fighting the for many years to allow victims the opportunity to prosecute their perpetrators. Under the new legislation, the statute of limitations has been changed from 23 to 55 for those seeking civil action against an abuser and to 28 for those seeking criminal prosecution. Most significantly, and the reason the bill had been defeated so many times before, is its inclusion of a one-year window for all of those who were victimized at any time to come forward to seek justice. This landmark is a result of the hard work of advocates and the courage of those who refused to be silenced.

Taking action has given me the power over the events. It enables me to help others and to teach my students the importance of respect for all people. It has allowed me to write about my experiences forty years later without shame.

It has allowed me to claim the name Jane Doe 1, not as the victim, but as a survivor.

*The legal document included in this piece was part of a complaint filed against the Archdiocese of New York on my behalf as well as other victims. The 2004 lawsuit was dismissed because the victims had sought justice after the statute of limitation had passed. While these are real court documents and true events, the names of those included in the documents and in this memoir, including the name of the parish, have been changed.*

\*\*\*

Jacqueline Regan spends her days teaching writing to students at a public university in New Jersey, hoping they will use their words to empower themselves and others. Her memoir writing focuses on surviving sexual assault and her experiences growing up with a mentally ill parent. She lives in Cedar Grove, NJ with her amazing husband of 25 years, three wonderful children, and two cute, but smelly, dogs.

**You Too?**  
by Anne White

Visceral memories bubble up.      Survivors ask: You too?      Me too.

For years I lived my life as if it never happened,  
filled with shame and fears of blame for the attack,  
and doubt about the role of alcohol consumed on a night out.

Oyster-like, I kept my shell clamped shut,  
resisting all attempts to pry it open, not allowing anyone  
to touch my secret anguish hidden deep within.

The Kavanaugh hearings changed all that.

Watching Doctor Blasey-Ford recall  
the shock, the fear, the sense of helplessness she felt  
as he held her down and covered up her mouth,  
my body shook, my stomach churned, my throat choked up.

I cringed as he strategically transformed  
from calm judicial candidate to outraged victim.  
I was stunned by his responses, making light  
of drinking many beers with pals,  
then turning on the Senator and savagely attacking HER,  
when calmly asked if he might have a drinking problem.

And Dr. Ford? She never had a chance, of course,  
as men in the majority rushed his confirmation through,  
demanding proof of her recollections,  
with no more witnesses allowed to testify in public,  
no more evidence to help the Senators assess the truth —  
her allegations weighed against the plausibility of his denials.

Angry and sad that once again,  
in a “he said, she said” situation,  
HE prevailed,  
I reached out to my daughter Alison,  
seeking consolation.

I was shocked when she confessed  
it happened to her — a date turned into rape.  
Afterwards, as she lay sobbing on the floor,  
he mocked her:

“Come on, get up. You’re fine. You know you wanted it.”

Neither of us had ever told our stories  
to anyone, not even spouses.

For me the telling freed me from my secret shame  
and questions that had troubled me for thirty years unspoken.

I met him at the bar that night  
and trusted him to walk me home at 2:00 am.  
A little tipsy, we were flirting, bantering, as we meandered down the street.

Suddenly — he shoved me up against a wall and ripped my clothing,  
driven by his eagerness to satisfy his lust —  
“NO, STOP!” ignored, no one to help, the silent street deserted.

Like Dr. Ford, I’ve no idea how I got home,  
but the assault itself remains  
indelibly embedded in my body and my brain.

I can still feel the hard brick wall against my back  
and hear the sounds of panties being ripped apart.

Now many victims of assault,  
inspired by Blasey-Ford’s brave sacrifice,  
are breaking through the barricades of silence.

Survivors still may not feel safe in bearing witness publicly;  
we still risk blame and shame, especially when denied by him.

But Kavanaugh, unwittingly, has launched a reckoning of sorts,  
with some survivors willing to risk everything to tell their truth in public —  
and every day more rich and famous men are toppled by the telling.

For Alison and me, already close,  
the painful revelations have intensified our bonds  
and led to newfound trust and confidence.

At peace now, shells wide open,  
we light the way to healing  
with poetry and song,  
two iridescent pearls,  
glowing, growing,  
sharing, loving.

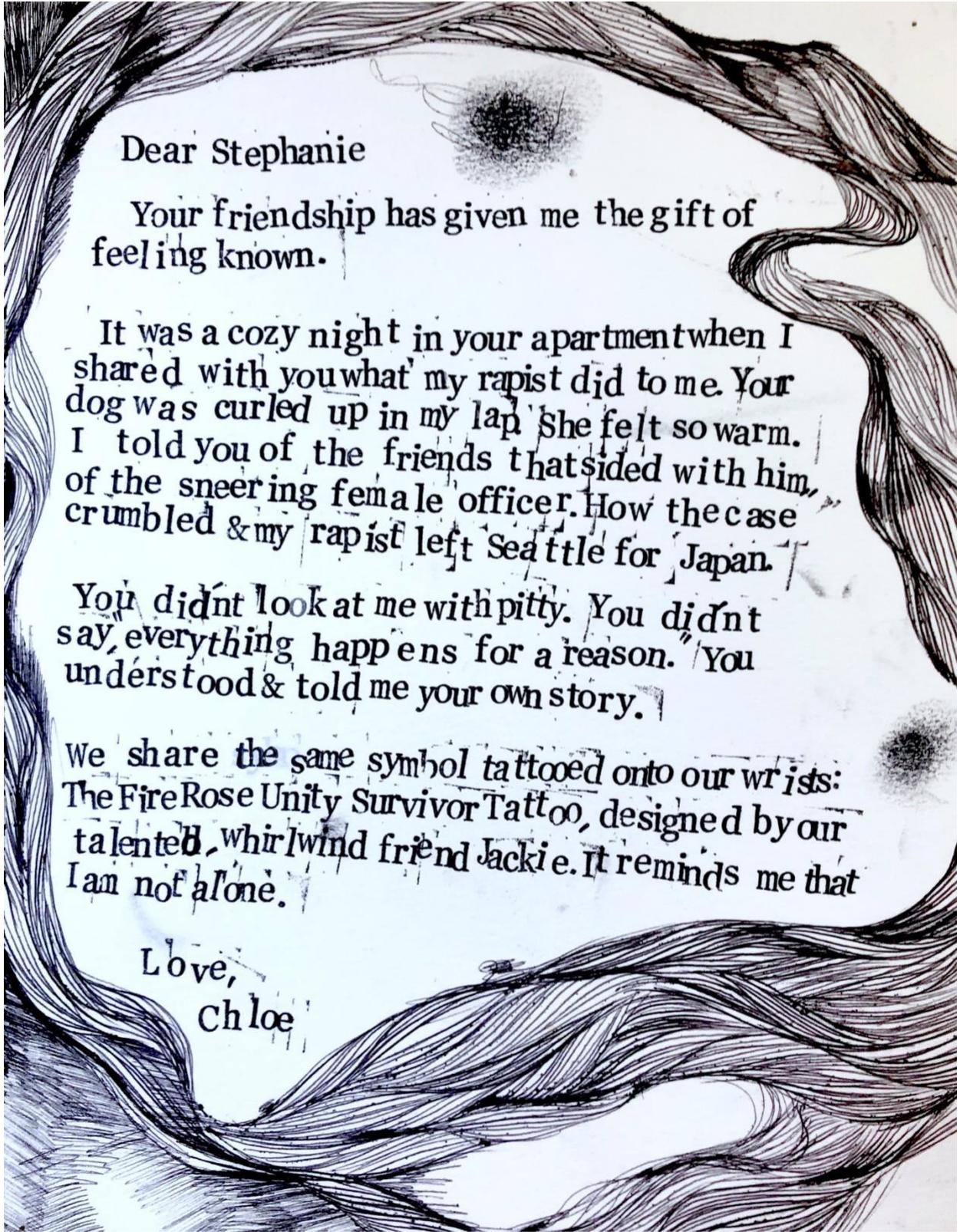
You too?      Me too.

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Anne White is a photographer, poet and lifelong activist. Formerly the Director of Education at the International Center of Photography, with “concerned photography” as a central focus of workshops, her own photos are wide-ranging, including photo stories about people struggling on the edges of society — from a Puerto Rican street gang in East Harlem to cormorant fishermen in China. Since moving to Sleepy Hollow, NY in 2016, she continues her activism, now with a focus on writing poetry, creating images with words. Recently, she led a project to embed poems in a new winding sidewalk alongside the Hudson River and was the Featured Poet for an Open Mic at the Hudson Valley Writers Center, where she read her poem, “You too?”, addressing the issue of sexual assault.

**Stephanie**  
by Chloe Allred





Dear Stephanie

Your friendship has given me the gift of feeling known.

It was a cozy night in your apartment when I shared with you what my rapist did to me. Your dog was curled up in my lap. She felt so warm. I told you of the friends that sided with him, of the sneering female officer. How the case crumbled & my rapist left Seattle for Japan.

You didn't look at me with pity. You didn't say, "everything happens for a reason." You understood & told me your own story.

We share the same symbol tattooed onto our wrists: The Fire Rose Unity Survivor Tattoo, designed by our talented, whirlwind friend Jackie. It reminds me that I am not alone.

Love,  
Chloe

**The Green-Tiled Bathroom**  
**by Jeremy Gadd**

A lifetime later, images of the green-tiled bathroom  
still recur - like an awful film noir segment - in her mind,  
a kraken repeatedly rearing out of the dark,

deep, abyssal trench of repressed memories.  
She can recall the colour and texture of the tiles,  
their symmetry and the shade of the grout that defined them,

the details on which she concentrated in her attempt to  
disassociate from what was being done.  
The family home's green-tiled bathroom was, to her,

a room of horror, no less awful than a dungeon of depravity.  
The green-tiled bathroom was where she paid the piper;  
her brother's fee for child-minding that left her with a lifetime of purgatory.

\*\*\*

**On Your Knees**  
**by Caroline Eliz**

Stringing needles  
through my ears six times  
before the age of 12 taught me  
that my moon shaped face looks better  
with earrings.  
For fear of forgetting my  
morning diamonds I  
used to keep them in throughout the night.  
Sometimes all I could feel was  
the pressure of metal pressing  
into the back of my neck yet, while I slept,  
I knew  
I looked pretty.

And perhaps that is why I hesitated  
to push you away when  
your teeth pressed against my neck  
so hard like  
cutting diamonds I thought  
you might draw blood.

You did always think I was pretty.

Don't look to me now with  
pleading eyes  
forcing me to apologize  
for something I did not do.  
You can blame me or  
the moment,  
the lack of light,  
the energy the vibe you felt that night the drink  
you poured for me.  
Just say

she wanted it.  
It would not be the first time  
you confused your knife of a tongue

for tough love,  
and your hands for protection  
as they smothered me.  
When you tell girls their body is a temple  
you do not mean it to  
preserve and protect.  
You mean it as if my body  
is a place of worship built for you  
to visit whenever  
you need to feel grounded.

You can believe in God  
and still sin in His church.

Whatever it is you are seeking  
I will not guide the way  
through your woods of insecurity  
and hormonal rage.  
My love is not a flashlight meant to fit  
inside your pocket.  
My love is blinding  
and stronger  
than you could ever imagine.  
My love  
is stronger than you.

I haven't worn earrings in months now.  
I just thought  
  
you should know.

\*\*\*

Caroline Eliz is a poet and undergraduate student at Worcester State University majoring in English with a concentration in writing. Her writing career began at the age of 16, and she published her first chapbook, *Late Night Train Lights*, at the age of 18. She hopes to use writing as a form of self-expression and to be a voice for other young, queer girls who look to poetry for healing and guidance as she once did.

**The Aftermath**  
**by Hope D. Weidemann**

I sit in the under the sea themed room. My mom is beside me. An uncomfortable silence adds to the heavy pressure my body is already snapping beneath. We are waiting to be separated. She will stay while they take me away. Put me in a room with blue walls, creamy chairs, and a kind woman to tell what he did to me. The detective sits inside the adjacent room listening. His presence is no secret. At this point I had already spent over two months attempting to forget this story. This story here they want me to tell. This story never welcomed to be told outside of this room. It is uncomfortable, and there is no pretty way to paint it.

I did not know there is a way to feel anxious in your wrists. Now I do. How when my mind is triggered, these arms he once held down can ache all the same to be free. The nervousness throws a raging party inside until I can no longer sit still. My brain battling what I do not fully understand. I do not want to understand. It hurts. and the hurting has never stopped. I have turned into a louder person when the anxiety eats away until I am nothing but nervous laughs overwhelmed that I have lost a grip on what it means to feel safe.

He gave me ptsd and yet the night we broke up, he threatened to kill himself for the pain I was causing. I do not stand on high places without thinking of the places he threatened to jump from. His roof. Ski lifts. In this sea room, I am reminded of his baseball tournaments at the beach, how he discussed how he could throw himself from his hotel balcony.

Once while my best friend and I lay in bed in disbelief of how things fell apart, he texted her how he was overdosing due to the guilt of it all and how his life was without me. One of his many lies attempting to keep a grip on what he no longer could control.

Writing about the depths of this fight is one of my greatest challenges. I have been a writer for as long as I can remember, yet nothing has ever brought such panic to my racing mind. If only the words could explain the emptiness when my body fails me, but instead I find myself staring at the wall each time the thoughts drag me into states I would rather forget. And how fair is it to go through an experience there is no way to write about what occurred in a literal way, that it must

be made of of metaphors and lightening the weight that has been keeping me struggling to keep my head above the waters for so long?

If I think too long about the same idea, it quickly becomes too much. How some days, the memories run stronger through my blood than my desire to live. How in my darkest hours, the people I was allowed to turn to were people I did not know, who were paid to listen. How I only learned the power of the voice after he chose to ignore mine. What it feels like to be the statistic, to make the 1 in 4 true of my parents four daughters.

I wonder what it is like to have to get away with a crime.

I wonder what it is like to have parents who will look at the crime that occurred as something more than a difference in moral compass.

I wonder if he ever loses sleep and how long it has been since he has thought of it.

For me, I am only ever counting the hours between being reminded, whether it be a friend too physical when joking around or waking up tears upon my face feeling just as terrified as I was the last night he touched me. There is no escaping. The breath still is lost from my lungs. The lonely leaves me sleepless and terrified, not of what is underneath my bed, but rather these monstrous memories inside my head. There is no peace here.

In the last three years, we have spoken twice online. The first for me to say, I reap the consequences of his decisions every day. His response ends in a statement of how I can achieve whatever success I desire. He does not know of the classes I have skipped when the conversation was too much, how I have orchestrated my schedules to avoid him. The second time is just a few weeks later, when I tell him he does not understand the depths of the damage he has had, that I cannot chase all of my dreams. I tell him how he made me look bad when he lied and denied the events that transpired when not once did I give a faulty account. He does not deny what I say but rather guilts me once more.

*He says, “Listen I am not sure what you want me to do, I apologized, and I’m sorry I truly am, but I don’t know what else you want me to do.”*

I try my best to bury the anger and all I want to hold on to. I attempt to plant seeds of grace and compassion each morning. But sometimes the sadness won’t break no matter what I smile through. Sometimes there is no stopping the tremor of my hands. No way to dam the rush of tears as the national news streams the president stating how hard society is for young men today. It brings me straight back to the moment we got the call; the DA did not want to pursue my case for lack of sufficient evidence. Being sexually assaulted in my relationship was having something stolen from a friend he told people he did not take. There is no proof beyond the sleepless nights and the way I cannot help reacting to these sensitive topics. All I can say is, I am not who cut the screen and broke the window.

How quickly I am brought back to the first time I told my story to authorities— in a police station room with mirrored windows. This society is so tactful in making victims feel like the offender.

I sit in the under the sea themed room. My mom is beside me. I am here because I am a minor so they must hire specialists when it comes to discussing the trauma I suffered. I am fifteen in this moment and no longer know how to comfortably speak to my parents without the disappointment in their eyes crumbling the bit of heart left within me. My mom takes me to get donuts as we leave the city, like she did when I would get shots as a child. It is uncomfortable and there is no pretty way to paint it.

In an alternate story, I never date him. In this dream, even if I did, he took “no” for an answer and we only kissed. If I cannot change the decisions, when I reported, I was not ashamed to share details with the male police officers. When I reported, I would have names for the acts against me. When I went to school, I would not lie to protect him. I would tell the truth to protect every girl. I would tell the truth because in both worlds, it is not my job to protect him. Still the story can stay the same in both of these narratives, but in this one freshly born, society is a safety net.

No one questions victims and there is no shame. I am not silenced for the sake of comfort. In this openness, I heal. In this safety, everything is okay.

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Hope D. Weidemann is from York, Pennsylvania. She comes from a family of seven, with that number fluctuating due to their active role as a foster family. She is currently a student at Penn State University, pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Hope began writing in second grade after her younger sister became terminally ill. She has continued writing as a way of presenting her experiences in a way that other's may be able to relate in hopes that they will not face the loneliness that she did. Her most recent works center around her experience being assaulted and its ripple effects. She believes that human connection is born in the ability to say, "I know how you feel."

**mapping**  
**by Doni Shepard**

*a short-list of losing yourself*

your home / their home / your small body cannot escape the hold / under anvil weight /

in mobile homes / in courtrooms /

you have confused the

meaning of love /

family /

safety /

your grief refuses expiration /

you must: rehearse remaining alive /

in—laps of boyfriends / boyfriends' brothers / fathers / you  
are still the safest choice / you have memorized silence / comply /  
obey / muzzle / bite your lips until you bleed / quarantine your  
voice /

your body is a

pendulum /

your voice a tangle of wreckage /

dissociation is clockwork /

grow up / escape / move / settle /

fight / love / fight / love / hide /  
love a man too much to let go /

he

will

demolish you /

refuse release /

his secrets / your prized possessions / truth sleeps

between the seams of your teeth /

hold your tongue now / before the sewage

s  
p  
i  
l  
l  
s

onto the dinner table /

force a family / fail a family / break your own home with your bare hands /

find hope /

date /

rape /

bruise /

examine photos of the way they left you /

cycle // cycle // cycle

escape the deathgrip

the earthquake

the anvil weight

follow a map out of your mind

other

there is no

choice

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Doni Shepard is a poet and lifetime learner residing in Washington. Her poetry, personal essays, and journalism have been featured by Lunch Ticket, Dirty Chai, Bloodletters Literary Magazine, Calamus Journal, Crab Fat Magazine, The Thought Erotic, Ursus Americanus Press, and Yes Poetry, among others. She holds a MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University in Los Angeles.

**Let Me**  
**by Judson Easton Packard**

*for Wes*

Let me make this ugly

Let me dye this purple  
blood purple  
bruise purple  
suffocation purple  
violence begat violets

Let me remind you what happens in spring time  
hawks and snakes  
and every glass eyed thing  
comes back to feed  
on anything soft against the skin  
that fought its way through winter

Let me name a balcony for its uses  
for the time you sat on it braiding flowers in her hair  
for the time she tried to pull you off it

Let me forget my anniversaries  
we have no happy milestones and  
no one marked down the dates we were raped  
(if only we were thinking ahead)

Let me make this ugly

Let me end this how I want to  
still hurting  
not trying to look brave  
only

to survive

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Judson Easton Packard was raised in the Hudson Valley but has since moved all around the country, finding joy in exploring the smaller parts of the country. They are an MFA candidate in Creative Writing at Rutgers Camden. Their work, both poetry and fiction, has previously appeared in Touchstone Magazine. They believe in in fairies.

**Mid-fall**  
**by Clara Fourcade**

Once, I saw a waterfall, frozen mid-fall. I stood below it, think-wishing it to melt and soak me with its hail - to feel what it's like to catch someone before they hit the ground.

Only now do I see how dangerous it was, to think but not say, to feel but not share, to need but not believe they should ever be met.

*I need your help*, I think to myself as I mutter, practice the sounds, the verbs and the nouns.  
*I need your help*, I think again, and there it remains. A need stuck in a brain that is frozen in pain from being left, over and over again, with needs erased. An eternity later, I hear myself say, *I need your help*, but no one is around to hear it. So I wait - a year, a day - till someone comes my way, and while I wait, I wonder: if they can't stop my falling, why freeze? If I'll fall anyway, why wait?

Today, I stand there again and ask the waterfall something else instead. Something I've been meaning to know: "Why is it that we freeze mid-fall?"

"Because," the waterfall says, "we are here to fall, and fall and fall, but not alone."

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Clara is a writer, photographer, & designer based in Chicago. She uses art to explore emotions and their complex place in our lives. With her work, she hopes to respond to suffering with beauty. She recently published her debut poetry book, *Poems for Aliens* (Water Sunshine Press, 2018), which will be available anywhere books are sold in June 2019.

## Meet Our Reviewers

### Arely Anaya – Literary Intern and Editor

Arely Anaya is a fiction major from Columbia College Chicago with a minor in writing for television. She splits her time between Illinois and Minnesota. When she isn't writing, she's raising piglets.

### David Blixt – Reviewer

David Blixt is an author and actor living in Chicago. An Artistic Associate at the Michigan Shakespeare Festival and arts instructor at the Chicago High School For The Arts, he is a member of the Awakenings Associate Board.

### Abigail Brinker – Reviewer

Abigail Brinker is a first year Masters of Art Therapy and Counseling student at Adler University Chicago campus. Originally from Philadelphia, Abigail received her BFA in painting from the Tyler School of Art and gained therapeutic experience as an au pair for children with special needs. When she's not working, she can be found is cooking, exercising, or partaking in retail therapy.

### Donna Cunning – Reviewer

Donna Cunning is a poet, published newspaper and magazine writer, and Jungian therapist in training. She is a lifelong volunteer and is most passionate about working with and serving survivors of rape and sex trafficking.

### Deanna DiGiulio – Reviewer

Deanna is an Intern and Awakened Voices Reader as an Adler University graduate student working towards her Master's in Art Therapy and Counseling. As an artist and advocate for mental health and social justice, Deanna hopes to promote the healing powers of the creative arts for survivors with her time here at Awakenings.

### Mary Frances Fleming – Reviewer

Mary Frances is in the process of receiving a BFA with Emphasis in Art Education from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is passionate about art education and supporting organization that serve to better the Chicago community through artistic processes. In her free time, she enjoys weightlifting, hiking, and eating ice cream.

### Jeri Frederickson – Editor

Jeri is the Program Director at Awakenings.

### Jordan Gottke – Reviewer

Jordan is a nanny, organizer, and gimlet connoisseur. She'd like to thank Awakenings for getting her one step closer to her dream of being paid to sit underneath a pile of cats and read things.

### Jen Hasso – Reviewer

Jen Hasso is an educator, historian, artist, writer, advocate for human rights, peace studies and social justice who has been fortunate to make a career out of her diverse interests and collaborate with scholars and creatives from an array of fields. She views the arts as a universal language that has the power to heal, unite, foster tolerance, promote equity and strengthen communities, both locally and globally.

Cate Hensley – Reviewer

Cate found joy in bringing witness to the submissions for the literary magazine after finding her voice through writing in her undergraduate education at DePauw University. She has felt the deep gratitude and healing strength of writing your story and is grateful to Awakenings for getting to be a part of that process for others.

Megan Otto – Associate Editor

is pleased to be the Associate Editor of Awakened Voices. She joined the Awakenings literary team in the fall of 2018 as an intern, and she has continued as the editor for The Nightingale, the companion blog to Awakened Voices. Outside of Awakenings, Megan is interested in collaborating with non-profits, writing children's fiction, and enjoying the green spaces in Chicago.

Bridgid Taylor – Reviewer

Leah Zeiger – Reviewer

Leah Zeiger is a dancer, writer, activist, and survivor. Her organization The Sunflower Project uses art to educate young people on abusive relationships and help heal survivors.

Alana Zucca – Literary Intern and Editor

Alana Zucca is currently pursuing her B.A. in Sociology at DePaul University. As a Literary Intern at Awakenings, this is her first internship in the nonprofit field – something she plans to follow in her future career. She's originally from California, so you can typically find her curled up with a book and a cup of coffee hiding away from this Chicago weather.