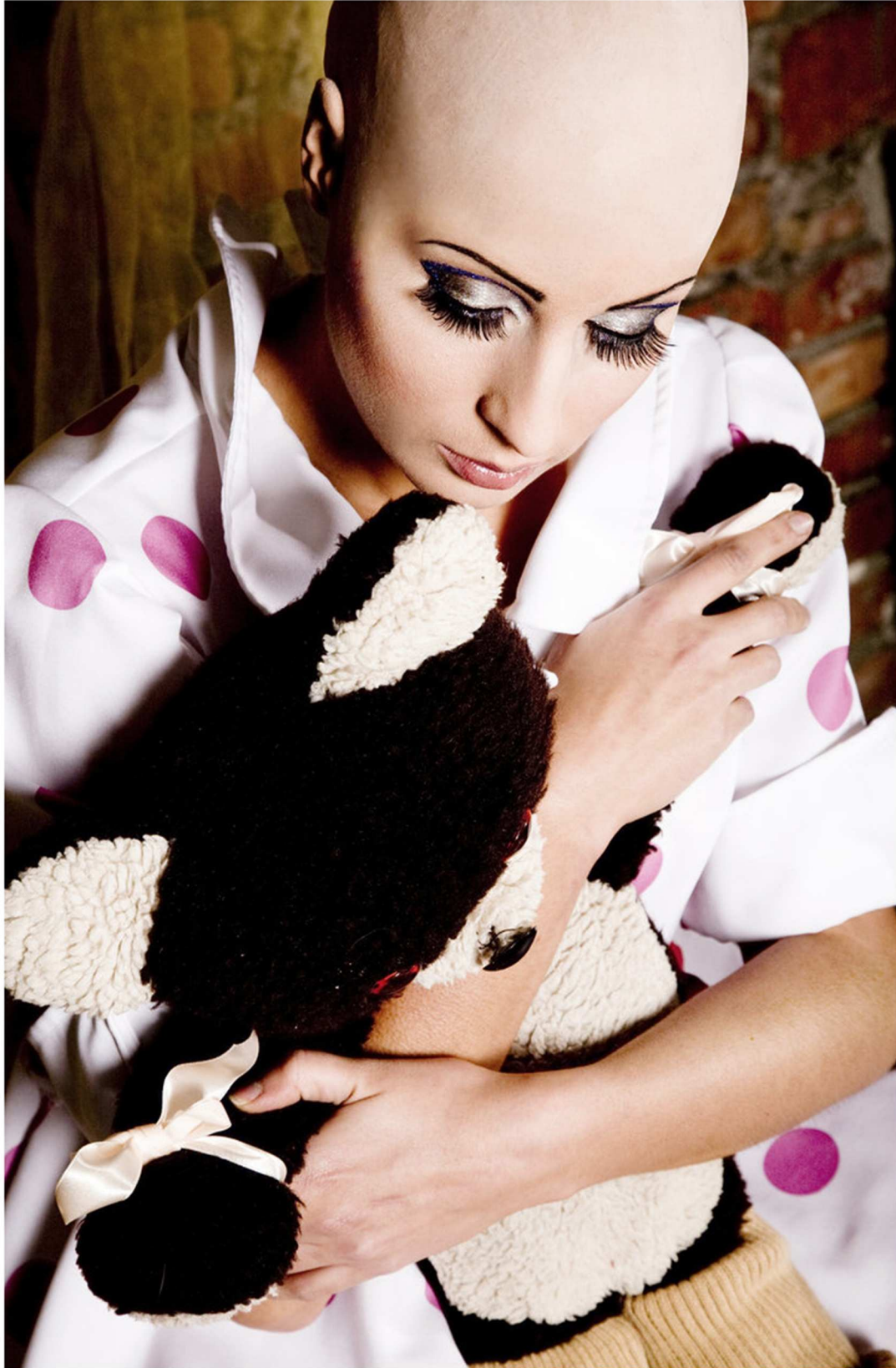


# Idiom & Image

The Arts Magazine of Sussex County Community College



2017



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# Idiom & Image

Contributors were asked to submit works of art and writing based on a broad interpretation of the theme, *Oh, the humanity!* The work displayed within these pages represents a creative exploration into various aspects of what it means to be human in our modern world.



1

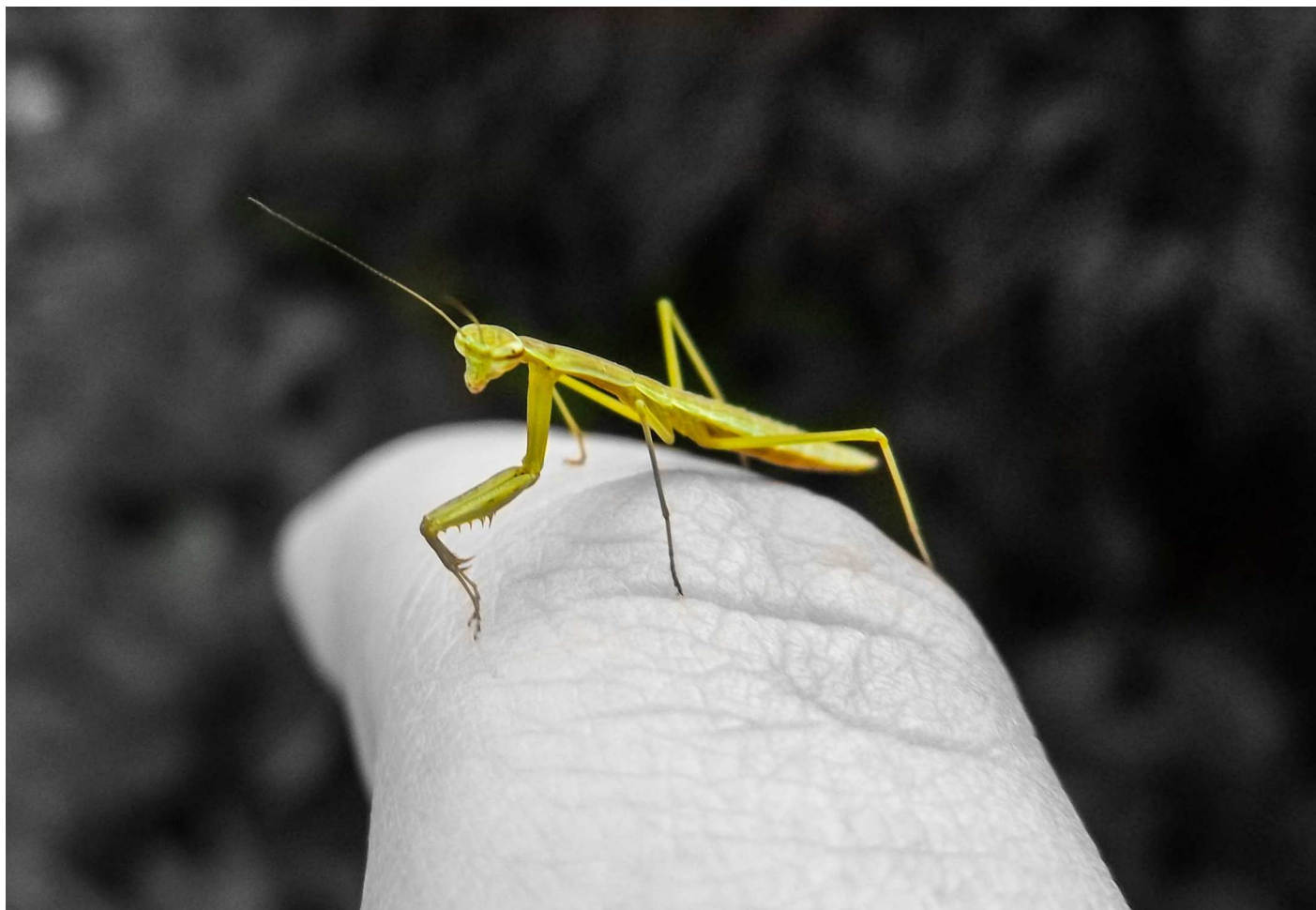
## Kindly Spirit

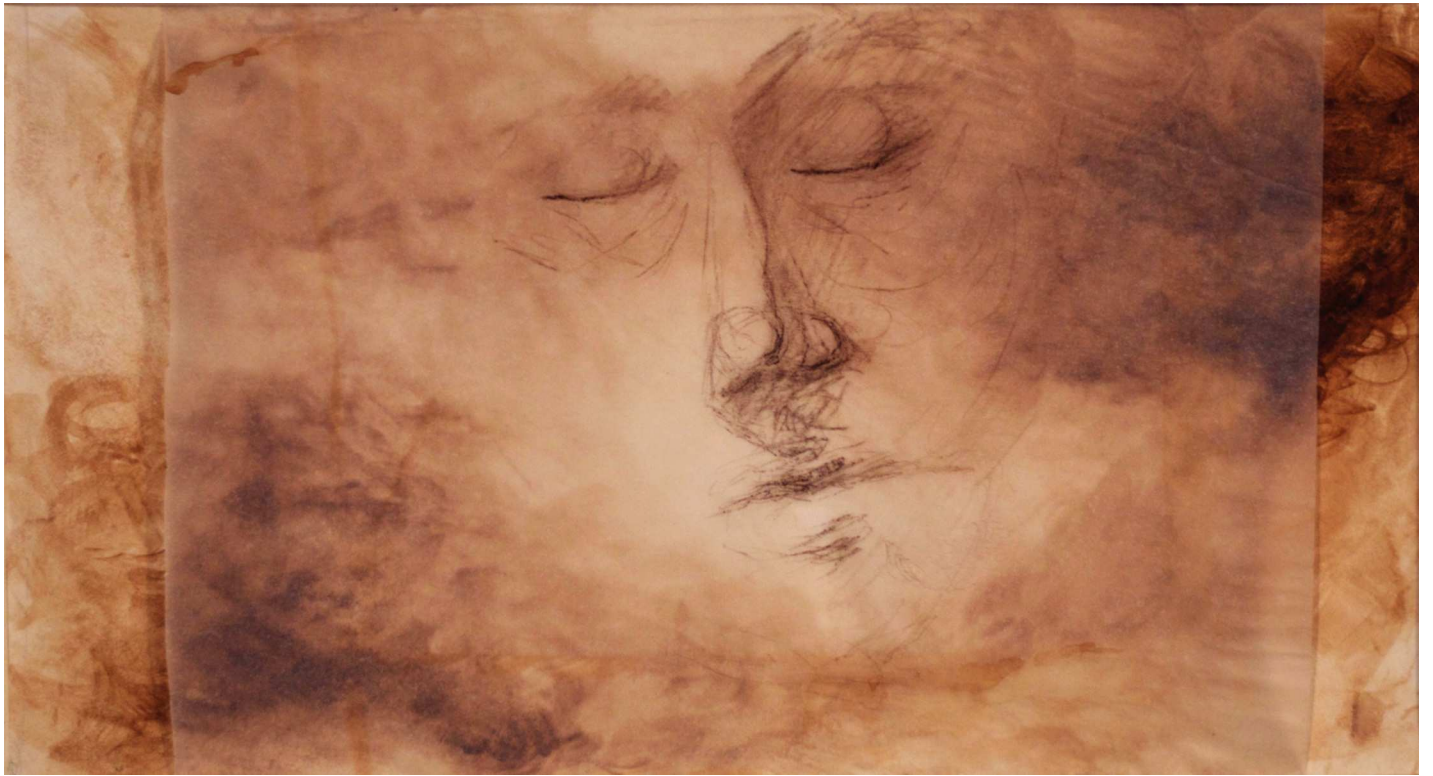
Sunlight dripped down on her face,  
Grass bent around her form,  
Her dress was made of sweet lace,  
In her eyes built a storm.

She drew on all petals,  
She skipped all smooth stones,  
She forgot the shine of fine metals,  
She lit a fire in her bones.

The blue jays always loved her,  
The robins sang her song,  
Mankind could not contain her,  
They never held her long.

2





3

4

## Work In Progress

You can write me into a poem  
Write me in prose  
Write me into the core of your soul.  
I am a multimodal being  
The many feelings of a haiku.  
I am more than a thought in your head-  
Manifest me into this world.

# Little Red Riding Hood

Lucifer. Diablo. Satan. Prince of Darkness. Beast. Demon. The Devil. We have many names referring to this dark creature of evil. A creature we, as human beings, believe to be so wicked, that when another human being commits iniquitous actions against others we tend to blame much of the cause on him. We don't like to believe that humans are capable of such horrific treatment toward our fellow man, so when a story like that of Jeffrey Dahmer rises to the surface we refer to his crimes as actions of evil. He has demons. He is a Beast.

If there is a God that represents all that is good in our world, is there a Devil that represents all that is evil? Does he exist? Can he use a human being as a vessel to influence evil and darkness within our world? The answer to these questions is, "Yes."

Adriel was a young girl from a little town in the mountains of West Virginia called Bethlehem. She grew up in the home of the ideal Christian American family, with two loving parents, and two close siblings. Adriel also had her grandmother, who lived in the next town over. As a child, Adriel was very close with her grandmother. They would often attend church, bible study, go to the mall, and watch movies together.

However, their relationship began to diminish once Adriel turned thirteen. She became more preoccupied with boys and being accepted by her peers. Adriel's grandmother was also getting older, weaker, not as vivacious as she once was. It had become a struggle for her to get out of the house on her own, but she refused to live out the remainder of her years in a nursing home.

Despite all of her declining abilities, Grandma always remembered to send a card on the holidays, to call on Adriel's birthday, and to bake and mail to Adriel her favorite pecan pie. But Adriel's new desire for social acceptance prohibited her from thanking her Grandma, from visiting her, or even acknowledging her existence. Their relationship was diminishing, but Grandma never stopped loving Adriel.

Adriel's behavior began to change quite drastically. She stopped attending church and bible study to spend more time with her friends. Grandma continued to call and check up on her beloved granddaughter, but Adriel continued not to offer any response.

Soon things began happening to Adriel. She began having bizarre hallucinations and dreams. She would wake up every night at 3:00am to the sounds of heavy footsteps and breathing inside of her room. One night in the car with her friends, they were driving down a dark country road just outside of their town and Adriel saw her grandmother on the side of the road in her torn nightgown and covered in blood. These visions became more reoccurring but she would not inform anyone of her hallucinations for fear of being labeled as crazy, and therefore being rejected by her peers.

The night terrors in her room became more frequent, and now violent. She would awake to a sharp burning pain across her abdomen, and when she would raise her shirt to investigate the source of the pain, she would find deep lacerations across her stomach; the lacerations appeared to come from the claws of an animal, or a beast.

Adriel knew the only person to whom she could express her concerns was her grandmother. She was afraid, and desired help, for she feared that someone or something wanted to hurt her.

That night she knew she had to go see her grandmother and get her help. She frantically packed her bible and crucifix into a brown basket to protect her as she made her journey to her grandmother's house. She threw on her red hoodie, and as she was making her way out of her bedroom window, she heard the growling of an animal coming from inside of her closet. Startled, she fell out the window and hit the ground hard.

A sharp throbbing pain arose from her ankle. When she raised her pants to investigate the source of her pain she noticed that her ankle was bruised. It had swollen to the size of a softball. But she had to get out of there. She had to get to her grandmother's house. Quickly, she limped through the woods and onto the bike trail that cut through into her grandmother's town.

Her heart racing, breathing heavily, she could still hear the rustles in the woods like something was running alongside her. Dark shadows appeared on all sides and flew from treetop to treetop. The sounds of an animal growling and the snaps of large branches surrounded her.

She was able to see the end of the trail now. The single street lamp glowing at the end began to appear, but with every step it seemed the light would not get any closer. Her foot got caught on a rock in the trail and she crashed to the ground. She could feel the abrasions and cuts on her knees and elbows. As she lay on the ground she heard slow, loud footsteps approaching her. Face down on her stomach she could hear the heavy breathing and growling right behind her.

She reached for her basket and grabbed hold of her bible and crucifix. She placed them firmly to her chest. She began to pray and beg God for his protection. Her voice shivered with every plea for help. Behind her she heard a sinister laugh.

Overwhelmed with fear, she trembled and turned slowly onto her back to see what it was that was chasing her. A dark figure that stood like a man but was far too massive to be any kind of man stood over her. It was too dark to make out its face. She could only see its chest moving in and out with each breath, and its large razor sharp claws lying lethargically at its sides. With a crackling scream she cried out, "WHAT DO YOU WANT!" The beast swiped across her face and all went black.

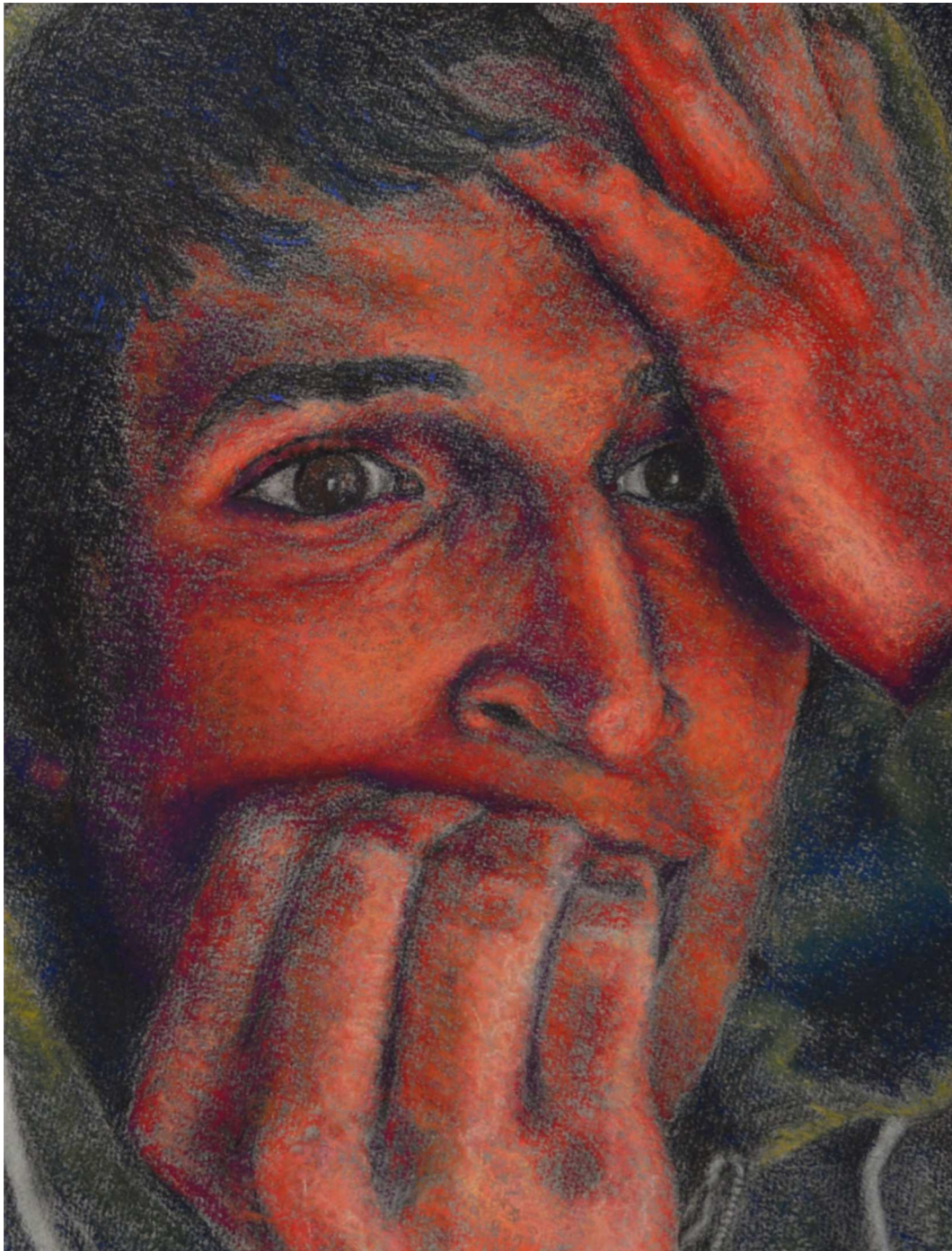
Grandma in her nightgown was fast asleep in her bed. She awoke to the loud sound of her wind chimes crashing together on her deck like something bumped into them, followed by childlike footsteps outside. Deer going into her garden in the middle of the night is a common occurrence at her house, so she dismissed the noise as such.

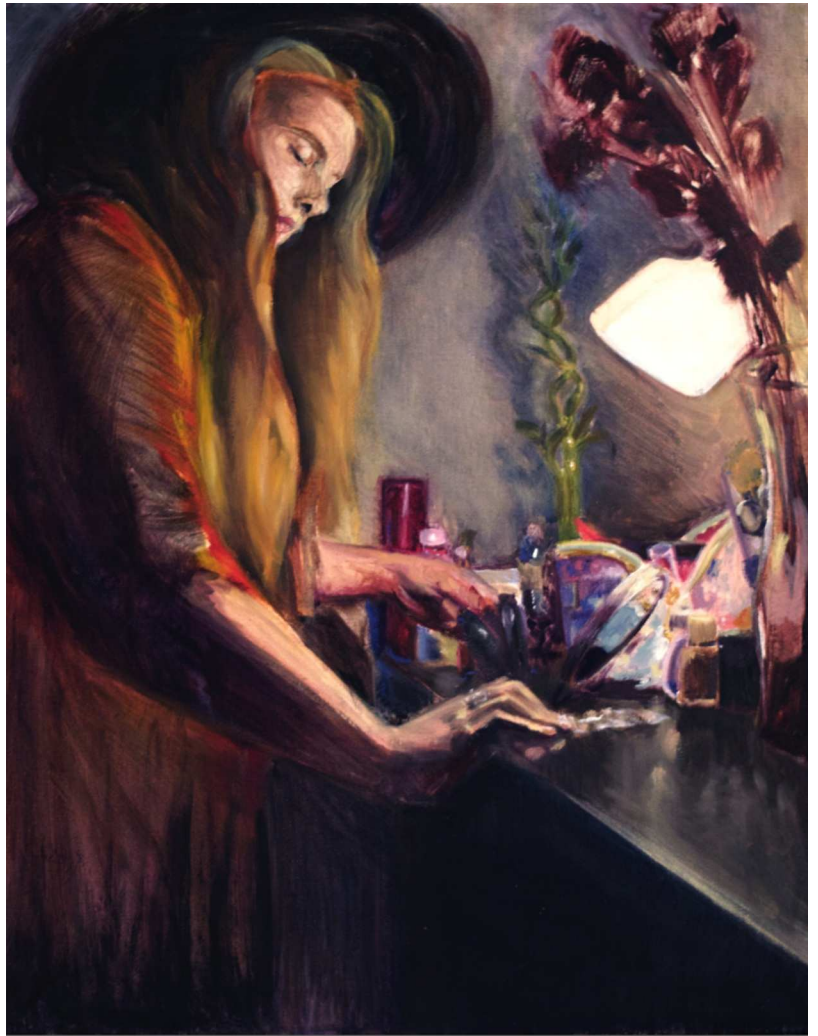
Then, she awoke to the feeling of cold, sharp hands across her mouth. She opened her eyes and saw a young girl in a red hood on top of her. "Adriel? Is that you sweetheart?" The girl then clamped harder onto the old woman's face and dug her sharp claws down into her cheek. The old woman let out a cry as the red hooded girl bit down onto the woman's throat. The old woman's sounds turned into gurgling, choking noises. She was drowning in her own blood. The red-hooded girl growled as she drained the life of the old woman. Skinny, corpselike, you could see the red hooded girl's vertebrae poke through her back as she arched up to apply more force onto the old woman and hold her down.

Soon the fighting stopped. With her fangs still logged into the old woman's throat the red-hooded beast began to laugh. She arose and her face appeared in the moonlight. It was Adriel, but she was

different. Her eyes were empty, her face covered in blood, and an evil consumed all of her innocence. This wasn't Adriel anymore. Adriel was dead, just as dead as her grandmother. Her body was now just a vessel for an evil entity. A demon in a red hood.

Do demons exist? My answer to that question is, "Yes." To this day there are reports of elderly people being brutally murdered all throughout the state of West Virginia. These crimes go undetected for quite some time until a passerby discovers the decomposed bodies. These homicides seem to all have two things in common. The victims all have their throats torn out by what seems to be an animal. And they are all elderly victims who are lonely or forgotten by their loved ones, so they are not discovered for quite some time. The demon in the red hood continues her murderous rampage. It seems the only way we can try to stop her is by checking up on and caring for our elderly loved ones.





## Reflection

As I gaze at my reflection in the window,  
I ask myself, am I beautiful?  
With hair like mud and hazel eyes?  
With light, pasty skin and a crooked smile?  
Am I beautiful to the world?  
Then I think to myself, Am I full of beauty?  
With my clothes in tatters and my life in shatters  
that are merely pasted together?  
A heart that once was in two  
now stitched together by strength and courage?  
A world built on the ashes of what I once was?  
A life with only the support of my heart, hope, and faith?  
A rainbow at the end of a storm?  
A sunrise painted with pastel blues, pinks, orange and purples?  
A simple smile?  
I think to myself,  
Is that not the reflection of true beauty?

adventurus hūmānitās

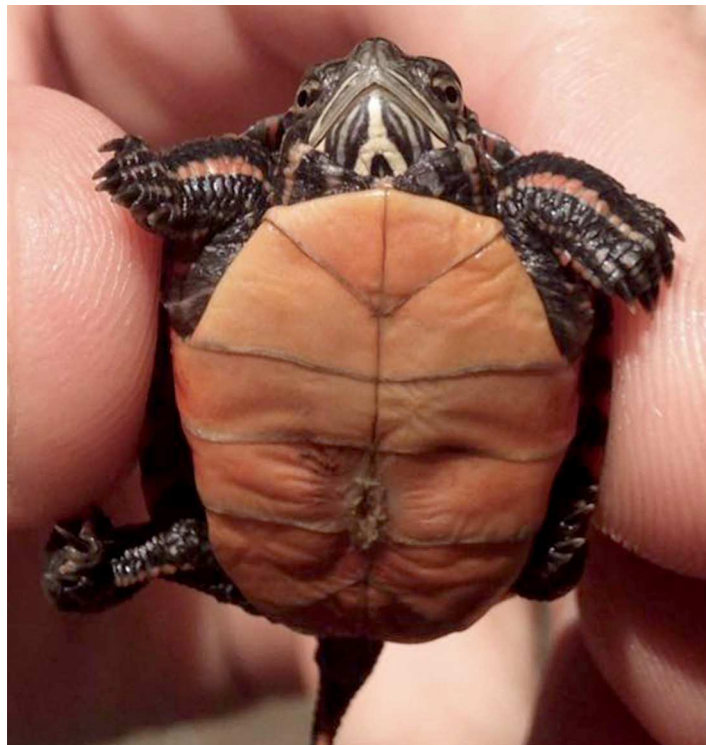
the connection of two produces **one**,  
a little **circle**, warm and nested with its mother,  
for they are the **origin**, the first creators,  
one day their **eyes** meet,  
twinkling with **curious** passion,  
why do these **giants** watch them so,  
what are these **images** when the dark encroaches,  
they become the first **spark**, to imagine,  
a world created from **within**.

children run beneath wrinkled **towers**,  
as little **songs** dance among the leaves,  
curiosity turns toward the **heavens**,  
spots scattered on **deep** canvas,  
the greatest **light** that keeps them warm,  
a glowing **circle** to admire,  
for it was the first **deity** to man,  
a god they **wish** to understand,  
and **peer** beyond the spotted veil.

a new **method** is what they need,  
imagination and **theory** to rebuild the heavens,  
so they **reach** across the blue,  
and each dot becomes a **map**,  
because their eyes cannot yet **see**,  
they bent waves to show new **bodies**,  
another **circle** to worship called home,  
now they can become one **people**,  
and their **engines** begin to rise.

riding the currents **lifts** them high,  
they conquer the wisps and **sky**,  
mastery comes from the **fundamental**,  
and the smallest **circles** come to view,  
but what is small is not **weak**,  
they remember an **ancient** god,  
and **burn** their way into the darkness,  
men in white with **mirrored** faces,  
look **down** at home as never before.

so the bodies become a **system**,  
with **worlds** unique to their own,  
they find **siblings** of poison and ice,  
and scour their weary **faces**,  
for their lines hold **wisdom** beyond,  
knowledge necessary for the next **voyage**,  
where those in white will **lead** them all,  
to walk on **dust** and frozen sea,  
and carry their kind to **circles** ahead.



Have you ever stopped whatever it is you were doing, looked around, and contemplated to yourself, *How did I get here?* I ask myself this question as tears stream down my face, the salt savory on my tongue. The rope is tight and taught around the supple, tender skin of my neck. It's 7 AM on a Saturday in December so the room I have called mine since the day I was born is still a shadowed landscape; the sun has not come up to slither through the slits in the blinds. The old wooden stool I stand on is rickety and one pound of pressure away from collapsing, but I suppose I chose this stool on purpose for that reason. Any second, as soon as I gather the nerve to stop blubbing and finish what I started, everything will be over. My world will slowly fade to black in a fury of chemical reactions within my body to ensure my last seconds are as blissful as possible. This thing that has been an uninvited Siamese twin for as long as I can remember will finally get its way, and I can't say I care. Once I'm finally done with this I will have my own form of victory and boy, will it be sweet. I know exactly why I am here, but it doesn't stop the mind from trying to distract me from what's going on. Right now is the moment I finally get set free.

It all happened out of nowhere. A seven-year-old kid isn't supposed to have burdens or stress on the brain, but I learned how to cope with stress quickly. There was no transition period for me. One day, I got out of bed for another monotonous day at school and, briefing myself in the mirror, I saw on my left shoulder was a creature. This thing looked like a barnacle of sorts, and had two small black circles, what I assumed were eyes, that peered back at me in the mirror, the entire mass roughly the size of a billiard ball. I didn't know what to make of it, it wasn't there when I went to bed and surely when I woke up I would've felt something there. I peered at my shoulder and could not see anything, but in the mirror, it was clear as day. I probably should've been nervous, but how could you blame me? When you are seven, you don't think about these things, especially when there is no pain. I went on with my morning ritual and got dressed; looked in the mirror once again and I could see a circular welt of raised red fabric on my left shoulder. Again, I peered down at myself but saw nothing. Whatever this was, it revealed itself only in my reflection. When you are a child, anything that is out of sight is entirely out of mind. Every moment, major and minor is fleeting. As my memory serves me, this welt stayed that way for a long time, no transition was evident, just staggered growth like a staircase. My eleventh birthday was a flagship moment in my life. Nothing improved, I did not receive an impeccably wrapped present, with the perfect gift inside. I woke up that morning feeling fatigued, exhausted despite a long night of rest. In the mirror the creature had grown. Now its appearance resembled that of a hybrid of a catfish and a human. The skin was a slimy grey, slick like a corpse that had been found on the murky bottom of a riverbed. Instead of legs, the bottom half of this monstrosity seemed to taper off into a tail of sorts, the bottom landing just past my knees. The arms, a plot of malnourished sinew that grasped around each shoulder, the hands spreading every webbed finger to its pinnacle in-order-to hang onto me. Its head was the size of a watermelon, and its mouth was pressed against my left ear, shattered teeth like broken razors filled its mouth, its mouth moving, but I heard nothing. The black eyes now much larger, stared back at me, like this thing was taunting me. I was paralyzed. Overnight, this thing I never gave a second thought to was now some demonic hybrid on my shoulder. Yet again, without a mirror, there was no proof of such a creature being attached to me.

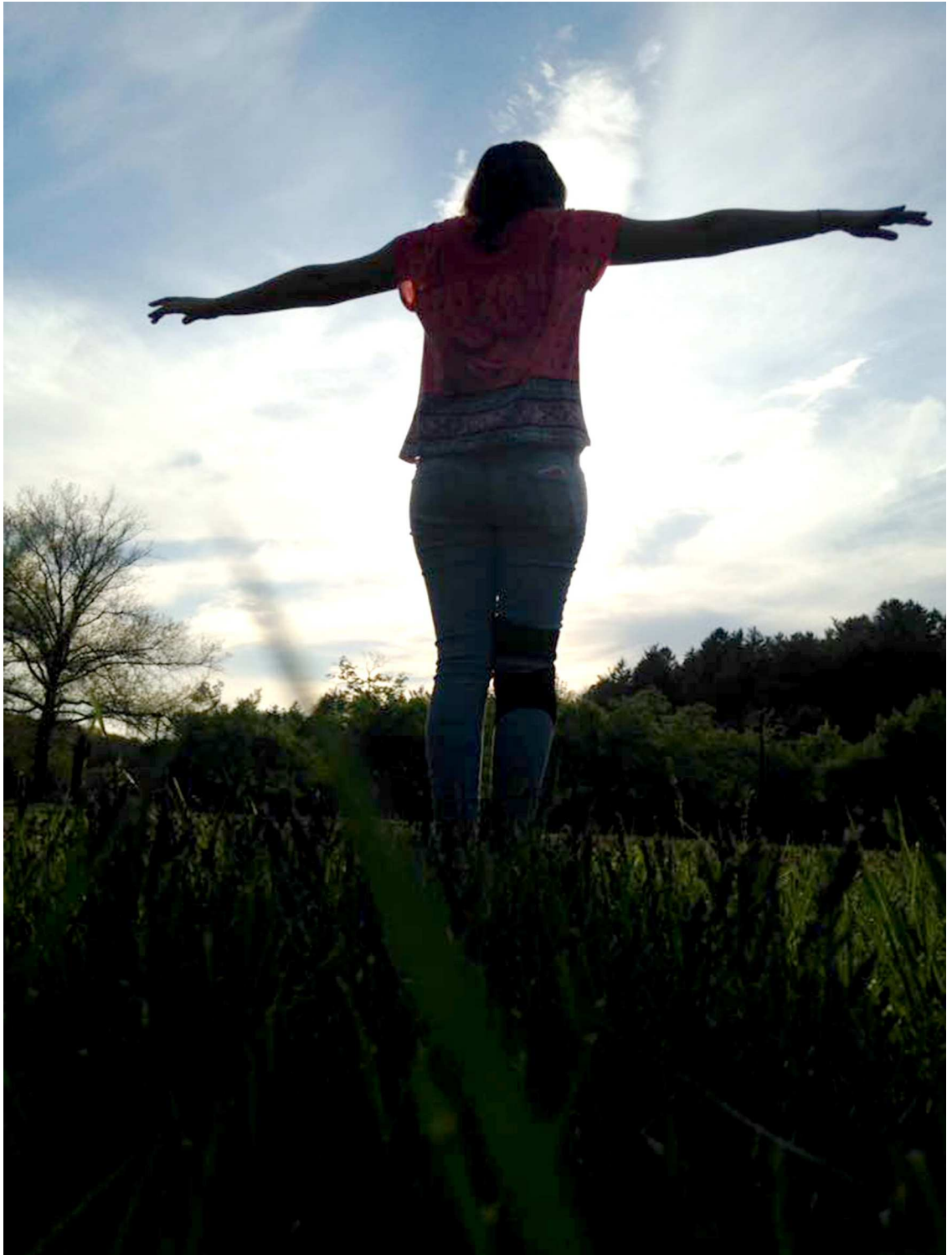
Life is just like anything else-where it cannot and will not be all sunshine and rainbows forever. Nine days after my thirteenth birthday my parents sat me down and told me in an angry, tension-shielded conversation that they were getting divorced. My world was shattered. I stared at my mother's mouth moving as my ears rang as if I was storming the beaches of Normandy. Based on how my mother and father presented themselves I could surmise who brought this divorce upon our seemingly happy little family. My mother did all the talking; she spoke so eloquently and clearly, walking the line of being joyous, as if she had just experienced a well-earned victory. My father was clearly struggling, every fiber in his neck tighter than the strings of a piano, his hands balled up into white-knuckled fists, a thousand-yard stare plastered onto his face. He tried to hide his fury and contempt of my mother from me, but no one can hide the universal communicator that is the eyes.

Like most divorces, I ended up living with my mother. Despite downsizing and struggling to make ends meet, she seemed happier than ever. I learned that day that it is possible to feel so much hatred toward someone that my mother would rather experience poverty everyday of her life than live with my dad for another second. She may have been over-the-moon with glee, but she could not see the burden over my shoulder. The creature had not grown since my eleventh birthday, but something changed inside me. Suddenly I started hearing its voice. The thing had been whispering to me for years, but one day the sound barrier eroded and every message the monster whispered was mainlined into my ear. The messages started small. In a voice like an emphysema victim drowning in his own fluids, it whispered, *Do it*. I didn't know what this meant and ignored most of the things the monster said. Without a mirror, I could not see it and it never seemed to talk in complete thoughts. I paid no mind to the sweet nothings this creature had to say until one day, it said a full sentence and I knew its true purpose.

I was never fair to my mother after the divorce. I treated her cruelly, like a second-class citizen. She always put forth an enormous amount of effort and I very rarely humored her. On one occasion, she asked me to help her cook dinner. I wasn't feeling like a closed-off, isolated brat that night so I lent her a hand. She made small talk with me and tension was beginning to die down until I heard the volatile voice in my ear saying *Kill her*. I stopped chopping and froze. I stared straight ahead trying to grasp what I just heard. It kept talking, *End her; you can make it quick*. I quickly told my mom I had to do homework and left the room. I had wondered for years what this burden on my back was, but it finally showed its true intent as a parasite. From the minute the creature figured out how to expel full sentences, all it talked about was death, destruction, and demise. Whenever I was around people, the voice would go into a voracious frenzy, choreographing all the ways I could murder people who walked by me. If I ignored it, it would just speak louder and louder eventually becoming a thundering whisper in my own psyche. This voice made it near impossible to be around people, especially in public. I managed to ignore it for the longest time, but the voice lapped at at my will like waves and eventually eroded me down to nothing.

So here I stand. I imagine most people spend their twenty-first birthdays surrounded by friends in a bar or club, enjoying all the spoils they previously could not enjoy legally. Me? I'm standing here on a dilapidated stool in front of a floor length mirror making eye contact with my parasitic friend. The coarse rope is irritating my neck, but that won't matter soon, nothing will. Still, as I stand here, the voice is incessant, repeating, *Do it, step off the edge*. I know the creature is telling me to do this now, but it doesn't feel as if I

lost. I am finally defeating a mountainous burden that has been a sickness within me for most of my life. With one last monotone encouragement of *do it* from the voice, I stepped off the stool. Most people say they realize how much they want to live right as they make the final move, but I never felt more free getting wrapped in death's welcoming embrace. Watching myself in the mirror as I struggle at the mercy of the fibrous rope, I see the creature disappear from my shoulder in a fog. The last bit of fog dissipates into the surrounding air. Through the reflection a gargantuan smile beams across my face. I won.





13

14

## Hating You

Loving you was like breathing; natural, calming, beautiful.  
But hating you takes the energy of the ocean,  
crashing to shore like your words on my heart,  
taking bits of sand and my soul out to sea where the monsters breathe.  
But you swore to hold me like the sky holds the sun,  
yet you dropped me to earth like the stars who gave up illuminating the dark.  
Like the stars who gave up and cascaded to our feet,  
creating holes where they had no business being.  
You created those same dents in my soul without question as to who may see it.  
Yet you once looked at me like the sun rose and fell with me each day,  
ensuring your light in this dark, treacherous place.



## The Mind of a Victim

This isn't real.  
This didn't happen.  
I can't tell anybody.  
This isn't real.  
I'll just go home.  
I won't tell anybody.  
They won't understand.  
Everybody is looking at me differently.  
Do they know?  
I'm ashamed.  
This is my fault.  
I am living a nightmare.  
There is no relief when I sleep.  
Real nightmares.  
Memories.  
This happened.  
This is real.  
I haven't told anybody.  
They will blame me.  
Do they know?  
How did I let this happen?  
I feel nothing.  
Numbness and rage.  
This is unbearable.  
Are people talking about me?  
I can hear them whisper.  
Or, at least I think I can.  
I don't want to sleep at night.  
Real nightmares.  
Memories.  
I don't want this to be my reality.  
I have to tell someone.  
I have never been so alone.  
They will blame me.  
Years have passed.  
I still have real nightmares.  
Memories.  
This happened.  
I am a victim.  
Physically, I survived.  
Emotionally, I have no choice but to continue surviving.

Bred for competition and consumption  
 The angry mob levels its eyes -  
 A study in self-righteous indignation  
 and the celebration of judgment and ridicule.  
 Whether through team spirit or mob mentality,  
 this ideology is pedestalled and revered.  
 The littered ground of discarded logic,  
 open dialogue, and rational civility.  
 becomes a mountain - Stung Meanchey.

The enemy stands before them  
 Multifaceted and kaleidoscoped  
 A harmony of differences and individuals  
 The Pollock/Krasner floor  
 A suppliant hat in closed fist  
 The ship in the harbor - waiting  
 Just waiting a turn  
 Empyrean shadowed but overheard  
 A vertical progression - Socrates and Glaucon  
 The melting pot so long ignored  
 Simmers  
 All possible permutations expired.

It's coming - pitchforks and windblown.



I once came across a monster in a bar who told me his life story about how he became human. He'd been one for years, messed with millions of people, and I asked him how he'd turned himself human if he'd been so terrible. He looked me straight in the eye and told me this story. "I don't remember the start," he said, "but I'll give you the clearest of memories."

One night, a very long time ago, I heard a man come by with his leather shoes slapping against the cobblestone. I stumbled through the shadows and saw a tall figure wearing coattails and a top hat enter a building. The man with the top hat exited the building with a woman whose face was covered in paint. She was an uninteresting thing, like the rest of the humans. Yet I followed, mesmerized by the man's confident stride and the glint of his cufflinks against the night. I felt the rush in my blood. There was something in the dapper man that I knew I could bring out. It unleashed something hungry within me, a deep pulsing need. The man would be easy. I didn't enter the man's mind, just whispered closely in his ear. His energy was eager, feeding off of mine. The ideas were there, just held back by doubt which I was able to smudge away so easily. The man led his date into an alleyway where the light of the lampposts didn't reach. There was another glint then, but not from his cufflinks. It was his knife unsheathed, pressed against the silk of the lady's dress. He cut her out of it and I trembled with delight. The lady took in a deep breath, relieved of her corset. *If only she'd known*, I thought. I stayed to watch until hours later when the dapper young fellow went whistling away. The sun rose and finally revealed to the world the woman left indecent on the cobblestones. Her body stiff. Heart still.

Next to me, the monster smiled, and I was not at all convinced he changed into what he said he was. "He was one of the best," the monster said, shaking his head. And he went on to tell the story of another one of his best.

There was once a boy of age fifteen who was the last of his class to become a monster. I took it upon myself to see what was happening and studied from afar. The boy wore fit jeans and a piercing in his ear. The other kids laughed at him and called him a fraud. But the boy did not flinch; in fact, he did not fear them at all. He kept his head down and went into school. His grades were superb, covered in stickers and praise. I slipped into his thoughts and heard his greatest desires. He was going to leave this tired, old place and move somewhere far, far away. And unlike my other monsters, he was going to be something someday. The other kids didn't care and continued to victimize him. Their persistence eventually placed fear inside the boy. *Something was going to happen*, he thought. *It'll be sudden yet slow*. And he continued to wonder why they wouldn't just leave him alone. I got tired of waiting and arrived at the boy's doorstep. I didn't knock, just stepped through the door, and I saw the pictures of him as a child and noticed how different he used to look. Sure, he still wore the same look of discontent, but with the long pigtails and a feather boa his mother had always insisted he wear. As I set the photo down, I saw the boy climbing the stairs, up to his room. I caught him by the arm and it startled the boy so much that he fell down the stairs. While the boy sat holding his head, weak and vulnerable, I slipped in and planted an idea. It was a mere sapling, but the boy's mind was fertilized with so much dread. The roots sank in nicely. I watched as the boy stood and walked down the hall to the last room on the left. He reached into his dad's drawer to pull out the gun. I whispered names in his ear and the boy only nodded, done with the games. The gun was in the boy's locker the next day in school. He did something different and held his head high, wanting the others to

realize he was never beneath them. Then a girl looked up at him as he passed in the hall. She blushed and gave him a small smile. After that, another girl and other boys offered him nods and smiles. The boy was starting to rethink his decision. But I did not worry. It was all part of the plan. The children were just as eager as I. After class, the boy went into the bathroom. That vicious boy, Steve, was in there, and sneered. He spit words like "tranny" at him and walked past.

"This was the strange part," the monster told me, tilting his head as if he still didn't get it.

The boy was brave for a moment and shouted something back. Steve froze. He was not amused. The boy was pushed against the wall. "You'll get what you deserve," Steve growled at him. But the boy wasn't fazed. After a day like that with smiling faces, he believed his luck was turning. It was going to be okay not just tomorrow, but possibly that day. When the boy finally walked out of the bathroom, it seemed like the whole school was outside watching him. He took one step forward and the realization hit him just as that other boy, one of Steve's friends, stood behind and pulled down the boy's pants. Everyone stared, not in silence, but in a roar of laughter. The boy unraveled. There was nothing for him here. Never was from the start. He started to run, but I reached for him once more. "There's something you were meant to do," I reminded the boy. "Something to do *today*." Soon enough the whole school was screaming at the madness unleashed, and I walked away whistling like the man from before. I'd lost so many of my little monsters that day. But the boy made it all worth it.

I stood quickly and grabbed my coat. This kind of conversation with a stranger was one sure to get me killed. But he grabbed my wrist like he had the boy in the story and told me to sit. "I have one more story to tell," he said. When I sat back down, he continued. "I was the embodiment of every single doubt and worry. I followed you humans everywhere, taking shelter in your minds and turning nightmares into reality. I turned lovers against each other. I destroyed friendships and people themselves. There was no one I couldn't corrupt...until her."

I don't remember when, but I was there when she was a young girl, smaller than anyone I'd ever come across. She should have shaken in my presence, but even as I stood above her bed, she slept soundly. When she woke, I whispered in her ear and told her terrible things about the world waiting for her. I told her what I'm telling you, except she just stared back with eyes that were far from distraught. I came back to check on her years later and saw how she had thrived. She had a boyfriend at her side and a bright future ahead. So I turned the boyfriend against her and watched. Watched as she only ever responded with an endless supply of love and respect. I was about to give up until I'd found out she was pregnant just weeks before graduation. This was my opportunity to slip in when she was weak. Again, I whispered in her ear, gave her ideas of the terror she was capable of, but she shook me out, turned me away and went on with her life. Something was wrong, I realized, and took fate into my hands. I killed her child years later; it was no older than two so she'd had time to love it so much that I could destroy her. And so I watched as she wept and wept. But that was the worst she had done. I hadn't turned her, just given her a scare. Again, she pushed me aside along with that deadbeat husband of hers, and went on with her life. I was paralyzed with fear. This had never happened. For the first time in my career, I thought this human might never change. At least not by me. So I moved on and found other meat, trying to forget about the girl. But I started to see changes. There were more like her who didn't listen. It was the first I'd ever heard of a kind that could not be corrupted. It affected my being in ways I never thought possible. My shell grew weaker, into one made of matter. It pricked much easier and was difficult to handle. It was getting harder to drift and I found myself limping on two legs like a human. Something was stirring within me, too. A buzz, or a beat, and I felt as if this was it; I was dying. One day, I turned on the news and saw the girl in the corner of the screen. She'd gone and joined the army, earned herself badges and medals of honor. But the words on the screen

read things like “treason” and “traitor”. I sat up in my chair and listened closely to the story. She’d been feeding information to the enemy from the beginning. It’d led to the deaths of thousands of soldiers, all trying to make their way back home. This was it. I could fix this. So I traveled to where she was hiding, eager to meet the monster that had touched her. The monster who could help me heal. There was no one in the house when I arrived. Only a small portrait of a man tucked under her pillow. He wasn’t far away so I followed his trail, eager to meet the monster that turned her sour. I found the man sitting in a room alone with graying hair and spots on his skin. I froze, didn’t come one step closer. I’d never seen a more human human. It couldn’t be possible. I rushed back to her house, desperate for answers. The door was open like she knew I was coming and there she sat, waiting. “I know you,” she said. “You told me terrible things. About a world and life of monsters so cruel. But I never believed you. I thought the world could be different. Though now I can see, that there was never a need for you to be here. Don’t you see?” She pointed a finger toward the empty spot in my chest. “You didn’t do this. No monster did.” “There had to be,” I pleaded. She shook her head. “There are no monsters but you. You’re the only one left.” And she opened up her mind to me, and I saw how the old man had hurt her while she was on duty. He never had a single bad intent, but she took his words to heart, let them break her down like I never could. She lost her grip and got caught up in the talk of everyone around her all sick and tired and wanting to just go home. Hopeless. There was a kind I could not corrupt. The kind that could only be ruined by themselves.

“I was once a monster,” the man next to me slurred. “It was my job. But the world didn’t need monsters like me anymore. You humans do just fine on your own.” And he collapsed onto the floor.



# Humanity

She's afraid to sleep at night  
Scared of what the darkness hides  
Only teddy bear to help her sleep  
Her promises she knows he'll keep  
Of her daddy she is terrified  
He has a lot of anger inside  
She prays, "Oh God, can you hear me?  
Why does this all happen to me?"  
And she cries

Wouldn't life be better if you didn't need to hide?  
Wouldn't life be better if you never need to cry?  
Having all this sorrow bottled up inside  
But what if these things happen to you and me  
So we can help someone in need?

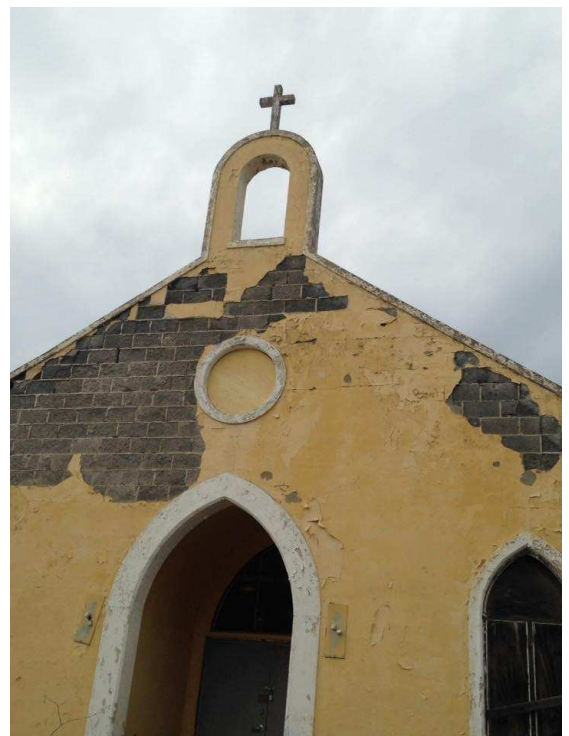
He lives with his mama  
Only on the weekends  
Then he lives with papa  
Who is just around the bend  
He remembers when things were right  
And they were living side by side  
He wishes on the morning star  
That things could be the way they were.  
And he cries.

She is three years old now  
And she's holding on to life  
She has stage four Cancer  
And she knows that she could die  
But she runs and smiles  
Like everything's alright she knows that the world would be a better place  
If she just wears her shining face  
And shares the love with amazing grace  
And lends a hand to the human race  
She knew

The world would be better if we held each other's hands  
The world would be better if we help each other stand  
What a better place the world would be to live  
If we used the things that happen to you and me  
To help someone else in need

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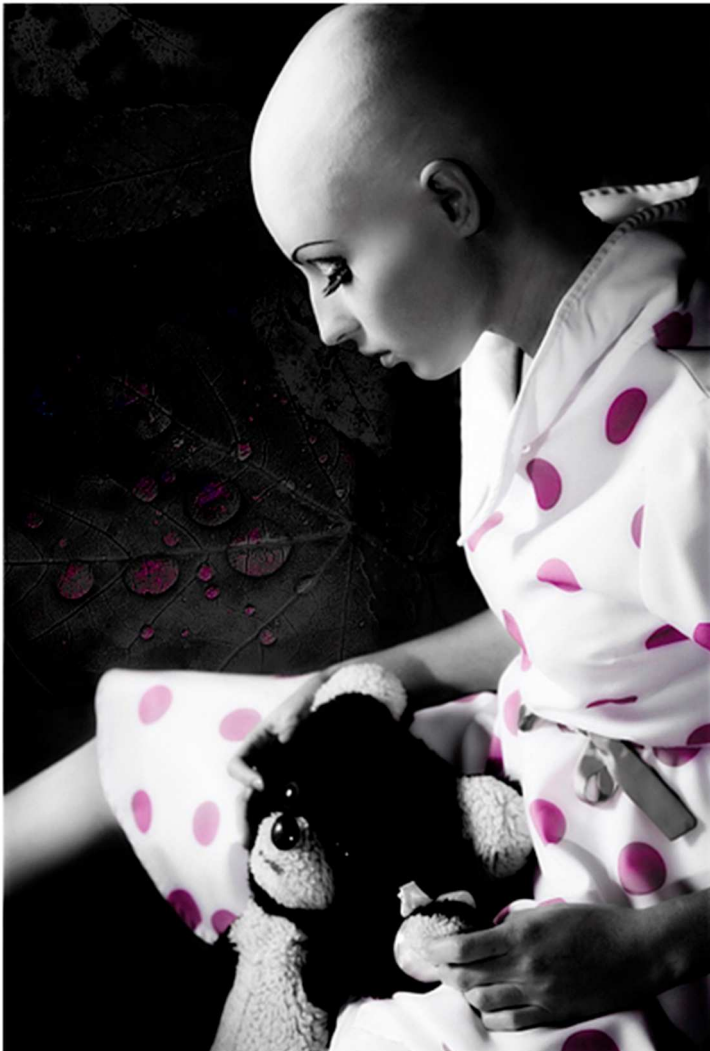
## Coming of Age

We met when we were four years old. Four was such a difficult age because I was jealous over my mom's attention, and the majority of it was given to her because she was someone else's blood in my mom's care. I didn't like her at first, but I learned to accept it, and we became friends.

We became best friends when we were nine, when we began to think freely and for ourselves, and when we began to make our own decisions. Age nine was better because we had more freedom. We rode our bikes, fished, played soccer, swam, danced, laughed, and formed crushes on boys. We were inseparable, and I liked it that way.

We were sisters by age twelve. We shared clothes and secrets and crushes. This age was harder because she had other friends too... But I didn't. This was the age when I realized that I was different from her. She was outgoing, funny, pretty, and people liked her better. "It's okay," I would think, "She's still my sister."

By age fourteen, we were strangers. Her other friends called me annoying. They said I wasn't good enough, that I was "weird," that I was "fat." They told her not to talk to me anymore. And she listened. So, one day, she wasn't my sister, or my best friend, or even a friend. I was nothing to her. And it stayed that way.





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## Changing Seasons

As the seasons changed, and the air got colder,  
our warm summer night together turned into just an autumn dream,  
and as the leaves fell off the trees, and rotted into the ground,  
our autumn dreams turned into winter nightmares.  
When winter passed, and the sun rose from its sleepy grave,  
these nightmares faded, and with spring came thoughts of new beginnings.  
We could be happy again, just not with one another.



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