

**THE SCARAB**  
Oklahoma City University  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>POETRY</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>USED</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>THE OUTSIDE TEXT</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>TRICKRIDIN' WITH THE GIRLS</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>MOI AUSSI</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>THE COLLECTOR</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>CAN WOMEN SWIM AT NIGHT?</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>ODE TO A SPICY SANDWICH</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>GOD IS LIKE THE SUN</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>NOTHING COMES EASILY</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>BRING ME SUMMER DAYS</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>COLD</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>BATTLE</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>A FALLEN KING</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>LOST</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>THE HANGED KING</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>DRENCHED IN COLD CONTENTMENT</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>THE MAN IN MY MIRROR</b> .....	<b>31</b>

<b>ART.....</b>	<b>31</b>
S. POWELL.....	32
TOWER THEATER.....	35
OVERHOLSER MANSION .....	36
TUCKER'S.....	37
MAIN FRAME.....	38
<b>PROSE .....</b>	<b>39</b>
A WORLD OF MIRRORS AND MANY FACES .....	40
HOW THE NIGHT GOT HER STARS .....	43
TILL DEATH DO US PART .....	48
GOOD MORNING TO YOU .....	51

To our readers,

In times of change and uncertainty, art allows us to escape to other worlds. In the pages of a book, we can find worlds of solace, of reflection, of terror, of tragedy, of fantasy, and of mystery. You will find all of those places between the two covers of this book, and we are honored to be the collectors of them.

Both the creation and consumption of art are vital parts of the artistic process, so we thank those who created the worlds through written and visual art. We equally thank those who choose to crack open these pages and explore the world of ink. We can personally guarantee that there is no better place to visit. Stay a while and soak up everything it has to offer.

Enjoy the journey,

Natalie Gregg and Joshua Moore, Editors-in-chief

# Poetry

## USED

*Matt Randall*

There against the back wall  
under bright fluorescent lights  
stands a line of poets,  
old and new,  
with the same bright orange sticker:

USED

Robert Hass is there  
explaining America to the ghosts of  
Basho, Buson, and Issa:

USED

Langston Hughes stands next to them,  
humming a theme for English.  
Across his forehead:

USED

Sylvia Plath argues with Li-Young Lee  
over form, subject, and thought  
while adjusting her own orange sticker:

USED

Billy Collins invites Henri Cole  
to a picnic, lightening striking  
Fuji in the distance, illuminating labels:

USED

Pablo Neruda sighs at the state of Chilean politics,  
eats spaghetti with meatless balls, and frowns  
at the Bohemian who spilled wine on his lapel pin:

USED.

And so the line goes,  
Pinsky, Dickinson,  
Whitman and Pope,  
all branded with thick capital letters  
proclaiming them  
wanted

### **The Outside Text**

*Matt Randall*

It slipped in right before the  
door closed, hiding in the  
bit of shadow created by  
the burnt-out light  
near the entrance.

The others took no notice at first.  
They were busy pulling intricate  
images out of the air, comparing  
summer's days to elegant women,  
talking of the memory of horses  
and the horses of memory.

It took a seat on the aisle,  
second row from the back.

The tall, exotic one to its right  
Ignored it, too busy composing  
internal rhythm and rhyme.

On and on they were called forward,  
these archeologists of morning,  
to extol symbolism, metaphor,

and clever turns of phrase  
while it remained a quiet observer.  
But finally it could hide no longer.  
The chair called upon it to speak,  
to share its internal truth.  
It was then that the other poems  
realized it was just bullshit  
disguised as post-modernism.

## Trickridin' with the Girls

*Matt Randall*

The four of us race  
around the bend,  
hooves thundering,  
horses sweating,  
our arms raised high.  
As one, we stand up  
in the saddle, throw  
our hats in the air,  
not knowing or caring  
where they land.  
Deborah brings her grey  
around in a tight curve,  
dips off to one side,  
her body suspended  
only by the death grip  
she has on the saddle horn.  
Zelie flips around,  
rides backwards  
while singing Waltzing Matilda.  
She used to do that twice a day  
while performing in  
the production of  
The Man from Snowy River.  
Sharon and I ride side by side,  
still standing, feet almost touching.  
We grab hands, wave triumphantly,

then with a jump,  
we've swapped rides.  
My hands grab for the reins  
of her strong brown bay,  
bring him around,  
hear him snort as  
the audience cheers.  
Another trick complete,  
another audience thrilled,  
another moment where  
the girls thundered  
and left behind  
hot dust full of  
tracks and history.

## **Moi Aussi**

*Lynn*

If only the forest could tell the stories  
That unfolded beneath its leaves  
If only the trees  
Could share her pleas  
Maybe they'd speak for me  
If suddenly their lips, pried open  
Resembling a young girl's  
Would they have the strength  
To softly speak  
Words she's kept from the world?  
If we listened closely to the sound  
Of their branches  
That sway and bend  
We might see more from a little girl  
Who too, did move with the wind  
Though rooted deep  
Bitter winter did creep  
Stripped half their flesh to bone  
The events that the trees perceived  
Left her broken, scared and alone

## The Collector

*Francesca Iacovacci*

I collect your kisses  
Like secret snow globes on a shelf.  
Each one a unique memory  
Known only by ourselves.  
And when the winter fades away  
I can still remember.  
I shake the snow globe up  
And see the days of last December.  
How comforting it is to know  
That seasons come and seasons go.  
Winter will once again return  
And your kisses I'll no longer yearn.  
But for now I'll collect some more  
So through the year I'll have them stored.  
And when, together, we can stay  
I'll still collect them anyway.

## Can Women Swim at Night?

*Francesca Iacovacci*

I've lost my car.

I know it's near, but I can't find it for the life of me.

It's 11:45pm and I'm downtown alone  
and anxiously circling the streets.

I'm not so worried that my car is missing;  
rather, that I'll go missing while trying to find it.

I hear a long, sustained shrill pitch  
that I desperately convince myself is a vocal bird  
and not the scream of another lost woman.

My heart drops

And my stomach scrambles to make room  
For this visiting organ.

I find my feet frozen to the cement-

Fear wrapped around my sneakers like a sticky adhesive.

The soles of my shoes cling to the sidewalk  
while the soul of my heart clings to my God.

I see a car circle around again.

Perhaps he's lost.

When I spot my car, I feel the impulse to run,  
like a reunion of sorts, but I try to walk calmly  
for fear of drawing attention.

I get inside and close the door with the urgency  
of a drowning swimmer desperately coming up for air,  
Gasping for life.

Women are drowning.

## Ode to a Spicy Sandwich

*Francesca Iacovacci*

A sandwich wrap, innocent and sweet  
I hold in my hands, preparing to eat.  
Without hesitation I take a bite  
Not prepared in the least, not even a slight.  
The attack was not immediate,  
The bandit takes his time  
Assailing me in an account  
of organized crime.  
An internal siren starts to scream  
As I realize what I have done.  
The sprinkler system begins to stream,  
Down my cheek the tears have run.  
My sinus burns with deep regret,  
A ringing in my nose.  
I try to hold the feeling in  
And keep myself composed.  
Though I admit I was alarmed  
I didn't stop quite there.  
I finished eating the sandwich wrap  
against my own welfare.  
I wish it were my "pants on fire"  
Like the old rhyme has sung,  
For instead this spice and my taste buds conspire,  
Igniting the flame on my tongue.  
Through the spice I persevered  
And survived the cruel attack.

The fire ceased, my taste buds cheered.  
And now? This is a "wrap."

## God is like the Sun

*Francesca Iacovacci*

The sun is a lot like God.  
You can't look directly at it,  
But sometimes  
the clouds arrange themselves in such a way  
that you can catch a glimpse of its greatness.  
Other times, though,  
The sun is behind the clouds;  
Still warming us in overcast  
As we struggle to overcast our mistrust.  
So faithful is the light  
That He paints a beautiful sunrise  
Each and every morning,  
Even though we choose to sleep through it.  
His love is faithful even when ours is not.

## Nothing Comes Easily

*Anette Barrios*

Your lips inspire a journey when they decide to light your face:

They curve first down a path that leads somewhere else

Before circling cheekily to bring fire to your flesh

And send laugh lines hugging tightly,

With crinkled eyes in total bliss.

All that for a smile?

## **Bring Me Summer Days**

*Anette Barrios*

Bring me summer days,  
Sifted and sliced to perfection.

No.

Let me fall to the ground  
And learn to iron my rumpled body.

But please...

Fill my winter dreams only  
With visions of dough and melted cream

Or spring me to some other time...

Requests seem useless;

To your cycle I am bound.

Ah but to look in search of nothing at all...

Is it wrong to get lost and not want to be found?

## Cold

*Alex Powell*

When my thoughts and emotions  
-and even my mind-  
all went cold,  
I no longer felt brave,  
I no longer felt bold.  
I didn't feel anything at all,  
my emotions shut down,  
an endless frown.  
I can no longer deny  
that something is wrong--  
wherever I go--  
I don't belong.  
Anyone else I see,  
they can feel nice:  
I can only feel cold as ice.  
Cool as a frozen lake, I can  
only make another mistake.  
I'm shut off from any  
feeling at all,  
from hope,  
from hate.  
It's too late!!!!  
I have this permanent fear,  
of vulnerability,  
of being weak,  
of being real.

I choose not to feel.  
I'm confused about it all,  
and why do I feel I'm in  
a never-ending fall?  
Not only unsteady,  
uneven,  
unsure.  
It's worse than only insecure.  
It's an impossible imbalance  
of intellect  
of intentions.  
I inhibit every impulse:  
I deny every distraction.  
Who I want to be is no  
longer an option, a possibility.  
I will simply grow old,  
always,  
only,  
forever cold.

## **Battle**

*Cynthia S Acevedo*

There comes a point when there's nothing left to lose  
Path traveled now you must carefully choose  
Discouraged from every angle doubt filling your ears  
Drop your weapons raise white flags run from your dark fears  
Hell no, dig your heels in deeper  
No time for that not giving in to the reaper  
Raise your eyes my child yet another sun has risen  
Their prediction of your failure is not your determined prison  
Attempts to assassinate your character without merit  
Seems they're enjoying the same bottle of tainted claret  
Assuming you're weak weary not an ounce of strength to even  
raise a sword  
They couldn't be more wrong; this is a battle they never could  
afford.

## A Fallen King

*Blake Yohn*

Kronos, the Hornèd One, Son of Light.

A god cast down from the heavens,

Yet still, he burns bright.

A figure of beauty with a soul of dark mud,

And hair of scalding flame,

And eyes of crimson blood.

His tongue, gold and strong, is soaked in his sin.

He speaks in soft sweet lies that steam from his smooth and shining skin.

A divine being of power and blindingly stubborn rage,

That now twists and screams from within his dark cage.

He has been ignored and imprisoned for far too long.

Now his light is too great, and his will is too strong.

The groan of his bastille is the tolling bell of death,

And his sulfurous lungs deliver the world's final breath.

## Lost

*Blake Yohn*

I don't know where I've been  
Nor where I will go  
Too much time spent on this blazing rocket  
Swaying to and fro  
Roaring past the storms of Jupiter  
To the vibrant reds of Mars  
Through the golden rings of Saturn  
Kissed by the fast and flaming stars  
To places unknown, where my eyes will gleam  
With wonder and curiosity and starving intrigue  
Where my toes will break the soil of distant, virgin lands  
And I will hold the meaning of life within my cold and blackened  
hands  
So now:  
There is nothing left to write  
There is nothing left to say  
Other than the stony words that end every dark and gloomy day  
Good evening,  
Good night,  
Good morrow,  
Farewell.  
But there was never anything "good" about it,  
At least as far as I could tell.

## **The Hanged King**

*Blake Yohn*

Drawn and draped in heavy chains  
Strengthened with locks of moral restraints  
His cloak stitched with the pages of holy books  
To keep him from lust and woeful looks  
A prisoner made from his own stabbing lies  
And the pain of his people, he drained their joy fatally dry  
Drawn and quartered by the blade of his sins  
And stuck back together by the dark gods' pins  
That prick and prod at the strings of the soul  
Until they break, one by one, and are left to burn in the coals

## Drenched In Cold Contentment

*Blake Yohn*

Drenched in cold contentment,  
like lovers in a storm. --

Do you know of an endless love?

One like silver pools filled with kissing doves?

Do you know of a place where kindness grows like roses

And the smell of sweet lavender drifts up our weary noses?

Do you know where you can find pure pleasure and delight?

Like dancing with Aphrodite in the pale moonlight?

I do, at least I did, but as you can see:

You think you're stuck here with the devil,

but you're really both trapped here with me.

## The Man In My Mirror

*Blake Yohn*

Do you ever cry, just to cry?  
Just to get that sweet feeling of release it gives you,  
Like dancing in the pouring rain.  
Well I don't.  
I hate you, all of you.  
Every one of you sickeningly sentimental people.  
You prance around like fairies,  
And your songs are like the wind:  
Pleasant, and free.  
It angers me; that you are not like me.  
And not simply because you are different,  
but because you can't even acknowledge that disability you have.  
That beautiful handicap of blissful ignorance,  
To ignore the chaos zipping around you like a swarm of bees.  
And eating at your feet like starving ants.  
My song is silence and the feeling of static  
All over my sore and aching skin.  
I walk aimlessly across a gray earth,  
With only silent shadows to keep me company.  
I stand alone at the precipice of nonexistence,  
And I feel nothing.  
Not cold or hot,  
Joy or sadness,  
Pleasure or pain.  
The great unknown beckons me with blood stained fingers,  
And I desire so deeply to feel its embrace,

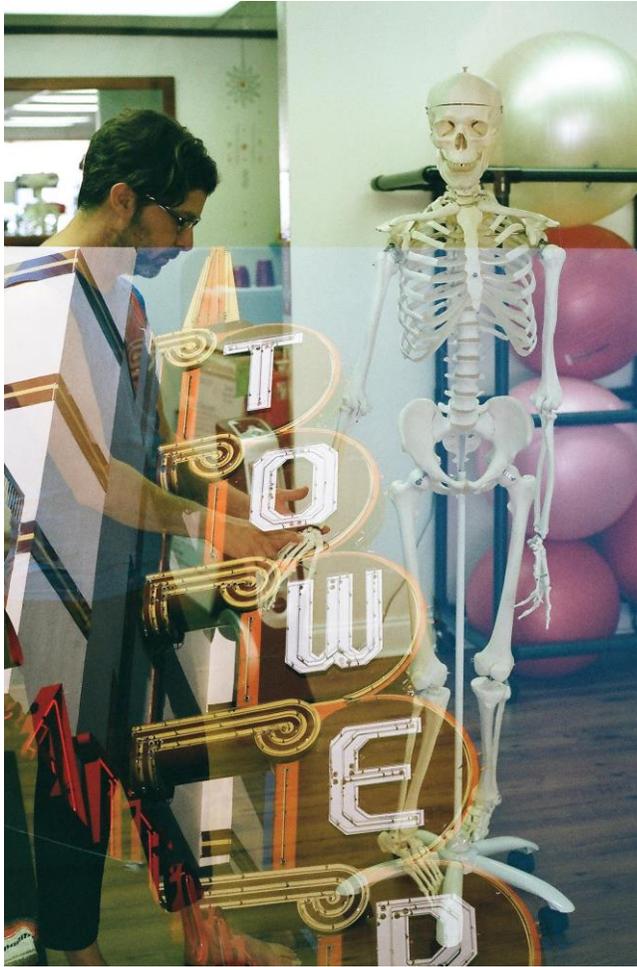
For then I will know I'm finally close enough to kill him too.  
I plunge my cup into his open chest and drink the blood of a  
god.  
My final promise to the world will be death, and my final words  
will be curses.  
I am many things.  
I am a void, a plague, a god with a tongue made of diamonds.  
I am a poet who speaks in beautiful lies.  
I am the dark.  
I am the empty.  
I am the end.  
I am.

Art



S. Powell

Alice Wolf



Tower Theater

Alice Wolf



**Overholser Mansion**

Alice Wolf



Tucker's

Alice Wolf



SVA ET 2020

Main Frame

Ethan Tate

# Prose

## A World of Mirrors and Many Faces

*Blake Yohn*

A world of mirrors and many faces. Some would call it a maze or some form of nightmare, but I call it home. A land constantly changing and altering itself so that even if you spent an entire lifetime there, like I have, you would never really know where you were. Clouds cover the skies and many eyes look down from them like restless wardens. In the few places where the sun shines through it burns so bright and hot you can never stay for long. There are so many of us here, looking through our mirrors but never truly recognizing our faces. The shattered glass mocks our struggles to understand our reality.

No one dies here or gets sick. So I guess you could call that a blessing, or a curse. Who would want to live in a place like that? I'm guessing you wouldn't, and rightfully so! This is an unsettling realm indeed, full of fear and anguish, but also joy and relief. There are many temples where the damned can congregate and speak of their many trials and adventures. Trading stories of faraway lands, mighty wars, and beautiful landscapes. They sing songs from their homelands. Some are joyous and uplifting, carrying the soul on a journey to enlightenment. Others are low and somber, bringing feelings of melancholy and necessary knowledge of the pain of living. Amazing art fills the halls: paintings, sculptures, drawings. Anything you can imagine and everything you could not come to rest here after exploding in the sky like shining fireworks. Their vibrant hues spread colorful showers across the gray landscape.

Nico was a man who lived in this strange world. He hailed from a kingdom not too far from that which he now resides. He was told of a great beast, one that could fulfill the deepest desires you didn't even know that you had. That promise of divine satisfaction was what brought him to immigrate to The Middlegray, where the great chasm, the infinite abyss, the god shaped hole resides. This is what would bring him to this beast that could cure him of his troubles.

As Nico came upon the chasm, he was perplexed. "Is this it?", he questioned, "is there nothing left to do but jump?". He was expecting some great journey across many miles and harrowing monsters dotting every twist and turn, but no, this was it. It was right here in front of him after a short walk through their strange masquerade ball and across their pearl bridges. An odd and beautiful walk indeed, but a short one nonetheless.

When he reached the bottom of the abyss, he slowed from the almost blistering speeds he was experiencing just a moment ago and lightly touched the dirt floor. A wave of relief and exhaustion washed over him. "Is it finally over?" he thought, "Am I finally going to find that sweet peace I have so long desired"? His train of thought was short lived as he slowly lifted his head and beheld a glorious door. It was almost too beautiful to be simply called a door, it was more like an amazing sculpture that functioned as one. He stepped forward and the doors swung open, their massive weight created a suction that quite literally pulled him toward whatever was inside. He sighed and continued.

Nico stepped into a large chamber, lavishly decorated like a stunning palace or the throne room of a king. He looked around and saw many beautiful sculptures of gold and columns of marble, the walls were covered in precious stones and bejeweled shields. The room shone so brightly it stung his eyes just to look at it.

That's when he saw him, a cheery man sitting on a massive throne of velvet and expensive metals. He wore a massive crown and his eyes twinkled with an almost unnatural glow. He laughed and held out his hand, "Oh, Nico!" he shouted with delight, "I've waited a very long time to meet you, I'm so happy that you can finally join us"! Nico took a moment to collect himself but then began to speak, "I've heard stories of you granting wishes to those who make the journey here, have I been lied to?" The king scowled at first but his smile returned quickly. "Of course not! I'm just as powerful as they all say, I can give you what you want, want, want."

Nico narrowed his eyes and opened his mouth to question the king's odd behavior and speech but before he could a haze settled over him and the room. All the overwhelming light in the room flickered but resettled back to its normal intensity. Everything else seemed to follow suit, settling back to normal, if you can really call anything in this place normal. The king on the other hand, did not return to how he was before. Not to say he wasn't smiling or jolly, he was but... he wasn't moving. At all. Not a blink, nor a heaving breath, not even the fur on his brilliant coat flowed in the gentle breeze that floated through

the room. Even the sweat on his forehead stopped in place. It was frightening to say the very least.

Nico stared at the mountain of a man with confusion but before he could say anything the room flickered again and became very hot for just a moment, he thought he saw something crimson and reflective covering the room. The metallic smell of blood filled the air.

“Why do you stand in fear of me Nico?” his voice became distorted and louder, “I only want to give you what you came here for. I only want to be your friend”.

A horrible noise like tearing metal and screeching laughter filled the room and the illusion fell completely. Where the mighty throne once stood there was now horrifyingly a writhing pile of live snakes and human hearts, still beating. The gems that covered the walls had become thousands of eyes and the sculptures just humanlike creatures in cages, whimpering. The ‘king’ was gone now, only his terrifying laughter echoed in his place. Nico finally found his voice and screamed over the chaos, “Who are you?!” Hot tears streamed down his face and his body became frozen and cold like winter wind. The sound of a massive clock quickly ticking and grinding slowly fades into a soft echo and a mangled voice breaks the silence.

“I am the voice of gods and slaves

The voice of those who cannot speak, and those whose words echo like roaring thunder

I am an endless duality

I hear... screams.

I hear death and suffering.

I hear the cries of every pained and broken soul.

Because I am them.

I reach out over the endless expanse of all that is real and is not.

Like a greedy spider I pull my fast and flaming web across reality.

All of history speaks to me in my dreams,

And their cries echo throughout all my waking moments.

Unfiltered, unrestrained madness courses through my blood.

So that the beat of my heart is the hammer of anguish on the anvil of misery,

The combined souls of all creation, natural and fictitious,

Are set under my boot and crushed beneath my interminable will.

Not to say that I am powerful, but simply that I understand.

I understand why they do it, those who pull the strings of reality with blood stained fingers.

They do it simply because they can. Wouldn't you?

Don't you realize? Can't you see the truth?

You are the beast, I am *you*.

*Take a seat your highness."*

And the laughter returned, but this time, Nico was the one laughing.

## How the Night Got Her Stars

*Samantha Kelly*

Long ago, when the world was new, the night sky was black and cold and dark. There was no moon to pull the tides and there were no stars to guide sailors on the smooth seas. When the sun sank into the horizon, all the people trembled in fear. They huddled around candle sticks and raging bonfires, for there was no source of light in the night sky. Most of the people lived by the ocean because the water reflected their fire light. The people's only comfort was that the sun always returned in the morning. They depended on the sun's light, for without it, the people knew they were doomed to darkness. For ages the people of Earth lived this way, in the cold and the dark.

Then one day, a millennium ago to you and I, an old man from a far-off land came down to the ocean beaches from the mountains. No one from the ocean villages had ever dared to go as far as the mountains because it took a day's journey just to reach them and going any further would risk being lost and alone in the dark. The villagers were amazed when the old stranger first appeared in their town. They did not believe there was anything beyond the mountains. How could there be? There was no light past them.

His ways seemed strange to them. Although he hobbled around with the aid of a walking stick, he had an aura of confidence and assurance about him. He did not tremble with fear when the sun began to sink low into the sky. Nor did he join the rest of the people around the bonfires and candle sticks after

the sun had departed. Instead, he calmly went into his little tent and went to bed.

The next morning, the old man woke up and went down to the beach. He sat on a log and began to draw pictures in the sand with his stick. A few little children cautiously approached him to ask what he was doing. In response, the old man told the stories of his drawings. Amazing stories of heroes and villains, stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. A new drawing came with every new story. Stories such as these, the old man explained, deserved to be remembered by all future generations.

By this time, the children's parents and village elders had come down to listen to the old man tell his stories. When they heard him explain that all future generations were to remember the stories, they scoffed. How could they remember the delightful stories well enough to pass them on, let alone their children and grandchildren? The old man just laughed with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Let me show you," and with that, the old man stooped low, he grabbed handfuls of sand and threw them up into the sky. The children giggled and did their best to mimic him. In very little time, there was sand everywhere. It fell from the sky like rain and even the adults had to smile.

That night, when the sun began to say its farewells, the people again started to tremble. But the old man told them not to fear, something wonderful was about to happen. The adults ignored him; he was after all just an old story teller. But the

children clung to him and even though they were small, they did not fear.

Once the sun was gone, something wonderful truly did happen. The sky was not black and empty as it was the previous night! It contained thousands of little lights! The people stared at the sky in amazement. They tilted their heads way back and their mouths fell open in awe. There was light in the dark!

"Remember the story of the bear?" the old man asked the children, who nodded but had yet to turn their eyes away from the sky. "She's right there." The old man explained, pointing the bear out.

Indeed, she was up there, and so were all the other characters from the stories the old man had told. The people laughed with glee. Now they had light and they could remember the stories!

"What are the lights called?" the children asked.

"Those are stars, they can guide you at night and keep you safe while you sleep." The old man answered.

The following morning, just as the sky began to greet the sun, the old man packed up his little tent and was on his way. No one from the village ever saw him again. They never even asked him his name. They called him The Star Man, and they told all future generations the story of how there was nothing but night, and then a man came and showed them the light.

High in the mountains, the old man looked out from his home and smiled at the village by the beaches. Soon they would venture away from the sea and discover all the world had to offer. The old man couldn't wait to watch them grow.

## **Till Death Do Us Part**

*Gabrielle Young*

Her heart seemed to skip a beat. Everything seemed far away from her reach; all her senses became intangible as she fell to the floor. She screamed but never heard the sound.

That morning, her husband Michael had said, "Goodbye, Kit Kat," as he always did. However, despite the many times he had said it before, Catalina only dwelled on that moment; did his voice sound a little different that day? For God's sake, the person you marry isn't supposed to die a year later. Till death do us part is just a thing people say in their wedding vows, but it's not supposed to come true, at least this quickly. Catalina forced herself through every moment. She would play the part assigned to her; the role of a grieving widow. She would eat all the pity meals people brought her. She carried out all her duties of planning the funeral for Michael. The perfect funeral, what a cruel joke. She told her four-year-old daughter that her daddy was up in heaven with angels because how do you tell your daughter that you're an atheist and she'll never see her father again?

Catalina shouldn't have gotten through it. How does a person move on from something like that? His death offered her no semblance of resolution; a car crash that did not even spare Michael's car. However, humans can be quite resilient if they really want to be. Telling herself, she was allowed to move on, Catalina learned to move on; she learned to love, even if it took her five years.

A white picket fence, a garden of flowers in the yard, and everything a person expects to see from a happy family Catalina had. She was happy. Through all of the pain, her feelings for Matthew slowly became stronger than the thoughts about Michael that haunted her every waking moment. In many ways, she had Michael to thank because she would have never met Matthew without the death of her husband. A grief coach, he helped her find her own identity; the part not intertwined with who Michael was but who Catalina is. He was exactly the opposite of Michael, quiet and analytical, as opposed to Michael, extroverted and outspoken, but although Catalina loved Matthew differently, she did so with the same fervor. Catalina often imagined if Michael and Matthew could have ever been friends, failing to reach a definite conclusion. They would either be a friendship that operated on the principle, opposites attract, or they would be diametrically opposed in most every way. Life was different now, but it was good.

Catalina started the day as any other, sending her daughter and husband off before beginning her painting. She always hated her desk job, and Michael's death had made her want to live life on her own terms, so she quit. She had never painted a day in her life, but that's the kind of person she was, willing to try with all the old painting stuff had been shoved in her mother's garage once upon a time.

Watching the colors swirl with the water, Catalina cleaned her brushes, proud of herself that Michael had only infiltrated her thoughts once that day. Startled from her daze by a tentative

knock at the door, she smoothed her hair and wiped her hands on her paint stained jeans. She walked to open it.

"Hello, Kit Kat."

## Good Morning to You

*Kristen Chua*

Don't get me wrong, I love working at The Crab Puff. I mean, I don't really understand my coworkers half the time, but they don't seem to mind much. They chatter and bark to each other and when it comes to me, they simply smile and kindly gesture around while sputtering out broken English. Maybe it's because I look Chinese even though I'm not. Or maybe they think I'm disgraceful for looking Chinese but not being able to speak alongside with them. Maybe they aren't really fond of me but, in fact, annoyed by me. Offended even! They really could be talking about my clumsy manner as I try traversing the tables and chairs only to slip on a fallen napkin and fall sideways into a crumb-riddled booth. Or my inability to sweep properly since there always seems to be yet another piece of food hidden beneath a table leg or lodged between the curves of the booths. It's a wonder I haven't been fired yet.

You know, I'm often very forgetful too. Probably one reason why I haven't been fired yet could be that I'm just lucky that my boss is also forgetful herself since she frequently overlooks feeding the fish in the long fish tank that's on display in the lobby. I had to calm a toddler once from hysterically crying throughout the remainder of our "open" hours because it was nearly nine o'clock and this child just witnessed one of the fish go belly up and float to the surface as his parents simply laughed and did no consoling what so ever. I was scolded then by my boss—who is, mind you, a four-foot-eleven-inch elderly lady with glossy thick glasses and a prickly personality—and I wanted

to scold her right back because it was essentially all her fault! She couldn't blame me because it was never my job to feed those fish, besides, it's not like she even knows how to reprimand me more than the vigorous wagging of a finger and a disdainful look with those narrowed, foggy eyes of hers . . . It's times like these I'm thankful that I don't understand Mandarin since the only words I can manage to pick out at times are "stupid" and "girl" usually in that exact order, one word closely followed by the next. Anyway . . .

It's bad enough I have to face scrutiny from my boss and my coworkers, but it's never been as bad as the scrutiny I face from unapologetic, hot-n-bothered customers due to this forgetfulness trait of mine. Usually a customer would request a refill or a straw or some napkins or even to-go boxes. And I'd respond with a jolly, "I'll get that right away for you!" then promptly forget the statement I had just made. Then someone from the table, usually an angered pot-bellied father or a hassled Cheeto-tanned mother, would begin snapping at me and yelling from three tables away, "Excuse me miss! Excuse me!" Then I'd have to walk back in shame as my Chinese coworkers would wonder what all the fuss is. At least they don't know what's happening. They don't know I've been humiliated in clear, concise English—maybe some French sprinkled in there if you know what I mean, you know, vulgar French—and I would only be embarrassed by the people at the table as their children watch in wide-eyed awed silence. Still, it'd never be so bad. My coworkers would never know! So, it's yet another way I've escaped being fired. But, I can't always escape embarrassment.

Embarrassment doesn't just end at The Crab Puff. Embarrassment tends to be like an incessant rash for me. I could scratch it, hope it'll go away, maybe even forget about it for a while. Then it'll itch again and when I try scratching it again, I'll realize the rash has gotten bigger and there are more rashes surrounding it and I realize they aren't simply rashes, they're mosquito bites, fricking mosquito bites, and they'll never leave me because mosquitos for some reason just love my blood. There'll always be times where I accidentally wave back at someone who isn't waving at me or drop my drink and watch as both the lid and the straw topple off causing an expanse of coffee and ice to go sprawling across the floor or when I swiftly turn a corner only to run straight into someone and their glasses. Those glasses cracked by the way. That day was extra awful.

Again, I can't always escape embarrassment.

Specifically, from Anderson. That boy who's in a class with me, a single painful class. That God forsaken boy with his eyes like two cold shards of unblinking, unwavering ice. And his voice was the sort that would glide off his tongue much like the slow and steady slice from the blade of a newly sharpened dagger. It was quiet too. Scary quiet. It's like he constantly talked in a mutter verging on a whisper. Anderson terrifies me, really. I just get embarrassed because I try too hard when it comes to him.

He's just in this constant state of stiffness. I like to think of him as the human manifestation of a frown. And I'm like the human manifestation of a smile! Well . . . more like the concept of a smile. Or, better yet, the human manifestation of an uncomfortable laugh in an awkward situation. Like I said, I try.

And that's exactly what I did. I'd try with Anderson. Once, I thought I'd try something. Something so simple. Only two words. "Good" and "morning." That's it! I hadn't even said it with the same conviction one would use if one were truly excited about how good their morning was. It was a demure statement of greeting from one person to another. But Anderson couldn't even throw me a single bone.

"Good morning." I had said it with hesitant eye contact. No, attempted eye contact. I was looking at him but he wasn't looking at me.

Then suddenly he was.

Then there was a pause.

I hadn't said anything to him at all up until that point. Up until that point we had just been two people who were assigned to sit across from each other, never looking up from our laptops, always typing away throughout lectures, no interactions between us. Here I was changing that.

He didn't like that.

"Good morning?"

One thing I knew Anderson and I had in common was the fact that we both arrived at our classes early when we could, but at this point, other people were beginning to trickle in and I noticed eyes darting at us. I realized then that his voice was raised at a slightly louder volume than it normally was.

I recoiled a bit and blinked in terrified confusion as he leaned forward. He was close enough that his breath fanned my bangs. I thought it wise in that moment to refrain from breathing in.

As my bangs bristled against my eyelashes, he continued on.

“Good morning? Making assumptions about my morning, huh? How can you know it’s been good?”

He noticed then the disturbance he’d caused among my bangs as they were in disarray upon my forehead now. The corners of his mouth upturned themselves and it looked like a smile. It wasn’t.

“Good hair.” I tried to respond but he was quicker, “You see?” I realized what he was doing. He was smirking. I knew that smile wasn’t a real smile. “Your hair isn’t good, and my morning isn’t either.”

And with that, his smirk faded and I heard a handful of snickers sounding from behind me. I turned to look and, when I had turned back, Anderson was no longer in my face and I felt it safe to breathe again.

After that incident, I didn’t try interacting with him again for fear that he’d resurface from beneath the hood of his sweater and mortify me in front of my peers again. I’d garnered enough humiliation from my mediocre work at The Crab Puff and everywhere else to last me a lifetime. I didn’t need any more! And for the most part, my plan of returning to ignoring Anderson and going about my business without communicating with him was going swimmingly . . . for about a week. Then, I was determined to try again. And I did.

The initial “good morning” wasn’t gonna cut it. So, I put my spin on it. Gave it different variations. Some days I’d try, “How’s your morning been?” then, if I was feeling ballsy, I’d add “I hope it’s been good.” Then that soon turned into, “I hope it’s been good!” And it continued evolving into, “How’s your week been?”

Good I hope?" or "How was your weekend? Good I hope?" or "How've you been? Good I hope?" or "How've you been? I've been good! You?" or "How are you? Hungry? You should eat at The Crab Puff. If you like Chinese food. Actually, if you like good Chinese food! That's neither an assumption nor an opinion, but a fact." I don't know what I was thinking with that last one to be honest. Not that it mattered though. Anderson'd never respond. He wouldn't engage but he also wouldn't disengage, you know? He didn't make an effort to answer me and he didn't make an effort to stop me talking either. And he'd never look at me or even nod as some sort of vague indication that he was listening. Although, I thought I saw him give a small nod once. But then I saw he was just looking at the board.

So, I just went about carrying on one-sided conversations with him and the fact that he didn't reply or even the fact that my classmates didn't cease their snickering no longer bothered me. Anderson's nonexistent responses didn't hinder me as I'd continuously try again and again to no avail. At some point, I stopped trying to reap answers from him and it just became something I did out of habit. It became routine. It was kind of nice and felt as though I was venting to a close friend. He was always there, without fail, sitting at the same chair and awaiting my string of words to enter one ear and out the other. Nevertheless, I'd smile and talk about: how I was thinking about taking a language elective to try learning Mandarin, how more fish were dying in The Crab Puff's disregarded fish tank due to an insufficient food supply, how I kept forgetting to clean one booth in a hidden corner of the restaurant, how I spilled a glass

of lemonade onto a couple which ended up soiling one's suit and one's dress, how I felt better about my job despite all the people expecting things from me and judging me endlessly, how I became unphased by all that because I've finally gotten used to it, how I enjoyed telling all of this to such a good listener such as himself since he would never interrupt, and especially about how I would keep losing things because of course I was always losing things . . .

Then, one day, I requested a pencil from Anderson. This was nearing the end of the year, senior year, and it was early in the morning and it was Monday and my brain was still hopelessly cluttered and muggy. And I had forgotten a pencil. I was so frazzled that day that I had also forgotten all about this unique relationship I'd formed with Anderson. I absentmindedly requested a pencil from him as I rooted through the contents of my backpack, hoping for a pencil to somehow materialize. Much to my surprise, he very suddenly obliged and I stopped my frenzied search. He hadn't looked at me once, only silently tossed his spare pencil vaguely in my direction and I barely caught it as it rolled off the edge of my desk. It was short, nearing the end of its life after being sharpened so often, the eraser gone with teeth marks surrounding the barren barrel at the end. I briefly wrinkled my nose but accepted nonetheless with a tentatively grateful smile. But, he'd somehow managed to catch my moment of undisguised disgust through his peripherals because I then heard his voice, so unfamiliar. I hadn't recognized it at first. I hadn't heard it in a while.

"You're really going to make that face at my generosity?"

"What do you mean—"

"I saw that."

"|—"

"Why? Do you want me to lend you a f\*\*\*ing mechanical pencil instead?"

Just as my wrinkled nose had wrinkled of its own accord only moments before, my face once again shifted of its own volition and I was left grinning dumbly.

"Yeah, actually that'd be great—"

His fingers didn't move from their place typing on his laptop and neither did his face which glowed a faintly white from the light of the screen. But his eyes did. They were now trained on mine.

"Yeah. Yeah? Well, no. You'll borrow my mechanical pencil then you'll walk right out of here and you'll never return it to me and you'll eventually forget about it yourself and you'll lose it somehow since you're always losing all your goddamn things. Don't think I haven't noticed."

I stared back dumbfoundedly as his gaze returned to the laptop screen, "Wait—What . . . What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means you forgot your wallet at The Crab Puff last night. Nearly forgot your keys and your phone too, but—" I thought he chuckled but it was so soft I must've just imagined it . . .

"You were at The Crab Puff yesterday? How did I not see you . . ."

"I'm guessing your shift just ended and you were in such a rush to leave that you failed to notice both me and your missing

wallet which you left on top of that poor, neglected fish tank by the way.”

Anderson was fully facing me now, his whole body had shifted on his chair, his left leg bent and tucked under the crook of his right knee. He was leaning forward again. It wasn't as scary as last time though. I think it's because he was smiling. Like, actually smiling. The little corners of his eyes were crinkled too.

I was praying that this wasn't some sick joke as he reached into the pocket of his hoodie. Then, to my astonishment, out from within its folds came my wallet! He handed it to me and I once again heard the chuckle I previously thought I'd only imagined. Ok

“And, hey, you were right.”

“About what?”

Anderson grinned.

“The Crab Puff does have good food.”

