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THE PEN

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA BEAUFORT'S
JOURNAL OF STUDENT
CREATIVE WRITING & ART



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YOU ARE HERE] 003

004] THANKS
] PREVIOUS EDITORS

005] PEN@10

FICTION] 007

022] POETRY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

076] COVER GALLERY

DRAMA] 078

ABOUT THE PEN]
] SOCIETY OF
CREATIVE WRITERS] 093

094] SUBMITTING
WORK TO
THE PEN

The editorial board of *The Pen* would like to express our sincere gratitude to the following for their help: Dr. Robert Kilgore and the amazing faculty of the English, Theater and Liberal Studies Department, Chancellor Al Panu, Lynn McGee and the Advancement department, Kate Vermilyea and Student Life, Austin Owens and DX Marketing, our sponsors, all of our contributors, our readers and fans over the years, and finally, most of all Dr. Ellen Malphrus for her guidance and enduring commitment over the past decade in keeping *The Pen* a place where so many students let their voices be heard.

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TEN YEARS AND COUNTING . . .

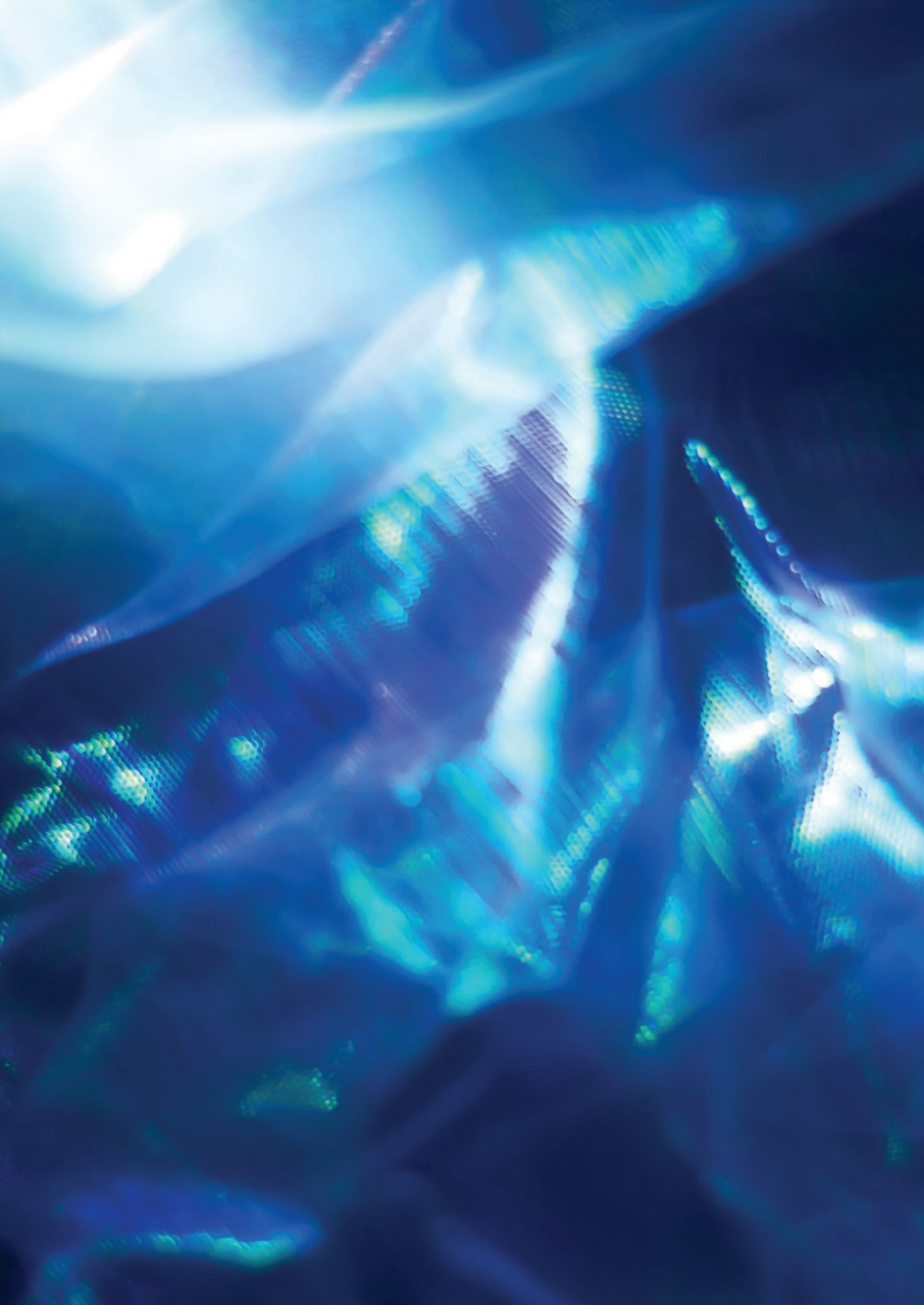
As I sit at my desk to consider the work that comprises a decade of *The Pen*, I turn from page to page and issue to issue – to remind myself of bygone poetry and prose and long-ago students. To my great delight, what I discover is there's no such thing. Every student, every contribution, is present in my memory and in my heart. I witnessed the development of most of the material in these journals, from spark to flame – including fizzles between – and the collective glow that shines from this effort is one of the brightest lights of my career.

Now, Gentle Reader, as you open yourself to the contents of this particular celebratory journal, I am confident that you too will find illumination within. These accomplishments can be held up for measure beside those of any undergraduate literary journal in publication, and the members of the editorial staff that transformed these endeavors into the beautiful volume you hold in your hands are unrivaled. I couldn't be more gratified or appreciative.

Shine on. That is my wish for the creative spirit that inspired and produced this collection of fine work. Shine on.

Dr. Ellen Malphrus
 FACULTY ADVISOR

PEN@10



LOVE FLIES

IMAGERY FOR ENYA'S *ONLY TIME*

Alternative Digital Photography by Erin Cline

YOU ARE HERE] **007**

BILL LISBON]
Control [**014**

FICTION

JESSLYN CRANER
008] Innocent Daydream

ALEXIS HENDERSON
011] A Lesson in Pain
012] God is a Drag Queen
013] Thoughts on Josephine

ZOË SLINGLUFF
018] Disintegration

VANCE WHITE II
019] New Game+

INNOCENT DAYDREAM

A CHILDREN'S FAIRY TALE

Once upon a time, there were three young, brave, brown haired nymphs. They lived together in The Small Cottage. They played together in The Small Cottage's Attic. They adventured together in The Small Cottage's Yard. But sometimes they separated and left The Small Cottage, because each enjoyed doing different things.

Jamie liked to climb trees and be a part of the sky, spreading her arms and feeling the cool wind through her messy hair. Because Jamie was always in the trees, it was her job to collect food. She found apples, pears, strawberries, blackberries, honeysuckle, walnuts, and acorns. She put them in a basket, then carried them home.

Jamie's sister Kylee liked to visit the river and be surrounded with the water, swimming slowly and dancing along the mossy stones on the shore. Because Kylee was always by the river, it was her job to wash the laundry. She scrubbed sheets, linens, shirts, skirts, dresses, nightgowns and curtains. She hung them on the clothesline to dry, then carried them home.

Jamie and Kylee's best friend Meisia liked to lie in the wildflower fields and be one with the earth, wearing flower crowns and running as fast as she could through the grassy hills. Because Meisia was always in the fields, it was her job to pick flowers. She picked daffodils, tulips, snapdragons, poppies, violets, daisies, and forget-me-nots. She put them in her pockets, then carried them home.

One day, Meisia brought Jamie to the field with her, saying being near to the ground was better than having your head in the clouds. "We'll never fly anyway," Meisia said. "We may as well take what we know we have." Jamie slowly stopped climbing trees, and she drifted away from her forest, only going back to get food.

She missed climbing the trees. She missed the messy hair she used

to have from the blowing wind. But she wanted to be like her best friend Meisia, because Meisia sounded right. It was better to stay near the ground when you couldn't have the sky ... wasn't it? But the more Jamie wanted to be like Meisia, the more crowded Meisia felt. Jamie was always around her, in Meisia's fields, and Meisia couldn't run or make a flower crown without Jamie wanting to do it too. When Jamie and Meisia lay in the grass, Meisia began thinking and wondering, and only pretended to listen to Jamie. She began to wonder what else was out there, besides the sisters and their home.

The sisters didn't know Meisia was not satisfied with their life together. They thought everything was fine. They didn't notice Meisia acting different. But one day, when it was raining. Meisia couldn't stay inside any more. So she pulled on her coat and went out. "Be sure to bring back snapdragons!" called Kylee. "And forget-me-nots!" added Jamie.

When Meisia reached the field, she did not collect snapdragons like Kylee asked. She did not collect forget-me-nots like Jamie asked. Instead, she began to think, and when she looked out across the land, she saw that it wasn't raining off in the distance. So, curious, she began to run.

Meisia didn't come back that night. Jamie and Kylee searched everywhere, but she was nowhere to be found. Even when Kylee stopped searching, Jamie continued to look. But no matter how far she ran, she never found her. Kylee hated seeing Jamie upset, and she tried to help her, but Jamie missed Meisia so much. Kylee had to gather food in the forest because Jamie spent every day in the fields, waiting to see if Meisia would come back. But she never did.

So one day, Kylee took Jamie to the forest. She showed Jamie the trees, reminding her of how she used to love to climb them and let the wind blow through her hair. Her sister didn't want to climb and ruin her clothes, or feel the wind and mess up her hair. But Kylee began to climb, thinking Jamie would see her having fun and join in.

"Kylee, come down!" Jamie shouted, angrily. But Kylee kept climbing. Suddenly, the wind began to blow, and Jamie realized Kylee wasn't coming down.

Fearing Kylee would be hurt, Jamie began to climb. She reached Kylee, pulling her into her arms to protect her. But Kylee pulled away. “I’m not hurt, Jamie. Look!” She pulled Jamie to her feet on the branch.

When they stood, they were at the top of the tree. Jamie was amazed, remembering all that she had forgot that she had missed for so long. She felt like herself with leaves stuck to her dress, when the cool wind blew through her hair, starting to tangle back into the messy tresses she used to have.

So Jamie went back to the forest, began to climb the trees again, and returned to the sky. She spread her arms and felt the cool wind through her hair, messy once again. She realized that she couldn’t spend the rest of her life sad because Meisia was gone. She shouldn’t stop doing what she loved because that was what made her Jamie. So she put away the memories, not because she blamed Meisia, but because she forgave her.

And perhaps one day Meisia would come back to The Small Cottage. Perhaps she would not. But for now, Jamie and Kylee played together in The Small Cottage’s Attic, and adventured together in The Small Cottage’s Yard, and sometimes left The Small Cottage, because Jamie loved the forest and Kylee loved the river. And things were different, but it was alright, because the sisters were together.

Alexis Henderson

A LESSON IN PAIN

Her insides went rotten when he touched her. Heart trilling, staccato, against her sternum as if to the time of a drunken jazz band. In that moment she imagined him strung from his thumbs or bundled up like a baby, bound by blankets, and squealing like a piglet. In the end it made no difference.

GOD IS A DRAG QUEEN

They met on a bus stop on the cusp of 8th Street on a dreary, dismal day in the dead of winter. A drifting rain fell sideways and the whole city seemed sluggish, like half the world was hibernating.

The drag queen sat on the edge of the bench, one leg (sheathed in fishnet) tossed over the other (bare), squinting through the thick fringe of her false eyelashes, posing almost. The preacher sat beside her, his collar loose, his crucifix hanging low to his belly.

“I’m God,” said the drag queen and he stared at her. “God with a capital G. Not one of those little fuck-wit demis. I’m the real deal. The big shebang; heaven and hellfire, smoke screens and thunderbolts, I’m all of it. I’m the whole nine yards.”

The preacher chewed on his own tongue, his hands trembled in his lap. “Who told you you were God?”

“No one,” said the drag queen (Firecracker Felisha she was called), and she laughed at him, a great rattling sound like a tolling cow bell. “No one tells God what he is. He just is. That’s why he’s God. That’s why I’m God.”

“That’s not the Bible says,” said the preacher.

“The Bible is spilled ink.”

“That’s blasphemy,” said the preacher and he sprung to his feet, his loafers squelching, a sound like a slaughtered piglet. “You’re not my God. I can tell you that. My God is the God of Isaac who brought the Jews out Egypt. My God is the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“I don’t have to be your God, or Isaac’s either. I don’t have to be anything more than what I am,” she said and she smiled at him with a sharkish grin. “That’s the point of being God.”

THOUGHTS ON JOSEPHINE

I knew her by smell: a stale perfume, dried flowers and leaf rot, the lingering traces left behind like a stain on my creased sheets and pillowcases as though she was trying to make my place her own. Sometimes I saw her phantom in the bright cast of sunlight shafting through my bedroom window, or in him when he smiled, her words etched upon his bottom lip in a tongue I couldn’t speak.

CONTROL

Every girl gets her own bin.

Rubbermaid brand. Transparent plastic with a powder blue lid. Six inches by six inches by twelve inches.

All of the bins are kept in the spare bedroom's closet and arranged in sequential order. They are not labeled. He can see the contents and knows to whom each belongs.

Some are fuller than others.

Bethany's contains a stack of envelopes held together with a rubber band, a few boarding passes, restaurant receipts and hotel stationery, among other things.

Tiffany's contains a single piece of paper with a phone number. The phone number is not Tiffany's.

Only one box can be opened at a time. His rule. He believes he would rather not reopen any of them, but sometimes he thinks he will find something that wasn't there before. Sometimes he wants to remember a moment of contentment. Sometimes he just gets drunk.

Felicity's is the first. The lid stays closed with a bungee cord, compressing in all the artifacts. Notes folded in triangles. Mix tapes. Movie ticket stubs. A penny taped to an index card with a date written in pencil.

His memories are singularities, gobbling up the echoes, but he cannot forget. So he compartmentalizes.

Every girl gets her own bin.

But Laura takes up two.

Laura's bins define two distinct time periods: after she and Greg lived only a few miles away from each other in Washington, D.C., and before. Then they lived no fewer than five hours apart and no more than twelve.

As the contents of Laura's pre-Washington bin lay on the floor

around him, Greg thinks about how distance is sometimes described in physical measurements and on other occasions in spans of time. He thinks about how time could be confined in a box, which is how Greg means to master his present.

Greg never ended a relationship on his own terms.

Greg holds a color photo in his hand and debates something he had never done before. He considers taking something from one bin and placing it in another. He had recently reopened Felicity's bin and discovered a photo from the time he had come home from college and helped her decorate for a high school dance. The photo, taken by Felicity, showed him and Laura unrolling a red paper streamer as if they were connected by it.

Three years later, Greg would fall completely in love with Laura.

Six months after Felicity took the photo, she fell completely out of love with Greg.

Six months after that, Greg completely gave up on Felicity falling back in love with him.

While he returned to Laura's bin often, he seldom returned to Felicity's, and he was surprised to discover the photo ten years after it was taken. He remembers unrolling paper streamers, but he doesn't remember unrolling paper streamers with Laura. Greg is concerned about cross contamination. Even as he looks at the picture, he thinks of both Laura and Felicity with his breaths building in pace like a departing locomotive.

Greg decides the photo was prophetic, so he places it in Laura's bin, quickly closing it in order to return it to the closet before Miranda came downstairs.

* * *

"You're up early."

"Getting a glass of water," says Greg, now in the kitchen.

"Left you dehydrated, did I?"

Miranda nuzzles up against him, placing her head on his chest, listening. Greg sets the tumbler down and wraps his arms around her lower back, digging under his T-shirt to feel her warm skin. His heart beats faster, exporting blood. Miranda purrs.

“Back upstairs?”

“Back upstairs.”

* * *

“So what do you want to do today?” asks Miranda, standing naked in front of the open dresser drawer Greg allowed her to use.

“Whatever you want,” he says, picking up the wet towel she left lying on the made bed.

She notices him taking the towel back into the bathroom.

“Sorry. I know you hate that.”

“It’s ok,” he says.

It was not ok; he fears mildew gaining a foothold. He foresees having to throw out the towel, breaking up the set. But then he remembers how Laura would barely even dry off, getting dressed with droplets of water still dotting her pale skin.

Dressed, Miranda is sitting on the edge of the bed when he returns.

“So?”

“So, what?”

“What do you want to do today?”

“Whatever you want.”

“For someone so particular, you’re not very decisive.”

* * *

Over the next few weeks, Miranda’s bin receives objects, things that would trigger memories in some distant, yet once again already arrived future, some train station hub Greg practically lives in. His mind is seldom ordered at the ends. Greg never ended on his own terms. Another effort fallen short. He looks at the paring knife against his skin, the point tracing lines on his wrist and forearm with just enough pressure to scrape the dead skin cells but not to paint. Never to paint. Only to consider. A cry no one would hear.

He places the knife on the carpet of the spare bedroom, where he sits with legs crossed. He stares down at the photo cut from the newspaper on the floor in front of him until it blurs. Pictured are an elderly couple, both in wheelchairs, wearing sashes and crowns. The King and Queen of Hearts. Ages 74 and 72, respectively. Married 45 years. Greg showed Laura the picture once, and she wept.

Greg looks up at the stacks of bins in the closet and the newest addition. Every girl gets her own bin. He was running out of empty bins.

The only thing worse than opening one and living in the past was looking at all the closed bins at once. The emptiness of it. The sense of falling.

DISINTEGRATION

The midday sun glows through the family kitchen window, fading across the room into a dark and dismal shadow. “The house was left in your name,” the lawyer told her. No longer would her name be the name on her husband’s lips as he jovially entered the house at the end of a work day. The flowers wilt on the windowsill, thirsty. Neighbors once stopped by to check on her, bringing casseroles and kind words. Eventually these offerings began to dwindle. Nobody stops by anymore. Now, she is the one dwindling and wilting.

NEW GAME+

The elevator closed behind the young man, clad in regular school clothes, his hand gripping a wooden bat. As the elevator continued upwards a wave of anxiety engulfed him.

This couldn’t be happening, could it? He did just wake up back at his crummy apartment with no friends, no awards, no explosion, nothing. He breathed in deeply, trying to calm himself down. He still had the envelope inviting him here, and that couldn’t have been a coincidence. There couldn’t be another contest, and despite it being the safer and smarter decision, he couldn’t have just stayed at home pretending it was all a dream, not because they might come after him but in a sick and twisted way, he couldn’t imagine not being here, and not taking a stand and not trying; trying one more time, but this time things would be different.

He quickly plunged his free hand into one of his pockets, filled to the brim with bandages and gauze. He had everything he could take and he had a weapon. So all that was left to do is plan ahead before those doors open. Keep the peace, keep asking questions, don’t start a fight you can’t back up, pick the left door, always the left door, the key doesn’t exist, grab anything you can get your hand on and don’t trust the dog, don’t trust the dog, do not trust the dog! He snapped out of his thoughts at the sound of a door opening, revealing a hallway with two doors.

In front of these two doors was a little girl with a small, shabby looking white dog sitting beside her, playfully wagging his tail.

“Oh, hello. You are right on time. Welcome to the contest,” the girl said, with a smile.

* * *

The girl stared at the young man as he went through the left door. She stood there in silence, confused at the coming of the new contestant.

Why didn't he say anything? Usually people ask a few questions about what this was all about, or what they had to do or at least something. Sure, she wouldn't have explained much, but that's not the point. She pursed her lips and turned to the white dog who was now happily panting away.

"I don't think I like him," she said. "He looked at me funny."

The dog didn't seem to take notice, so she shrugged her shoulders and walked through the left door as well, seemingly letting go of the whole situation.

* * *

The dog, finally alone, stopped panting and closed his eyes.

She may be a bit unpleasant to deal with, but the dog silently agreed with her. The new guy acted downright cautious of the two of them and he came in with a weapon, which isn't particularly common either. Things that aren't normal usually make for more fun, but the way the new contestant stared at them still didn't feel right to the dog. The only people that act like that are the contestants already playing with them. The dog thought some more, and then huffed in delight. Something was up, but that didn't matter much. He then sat up and trotted through the right door, which slowly closed behind him.

Things might turn out better than he thought they would.



THIRTEENTH FLOOR

Photo by Ciera Love

[ANGELA CLELAND

ARE YOU SICK OF IT? [24]

PAINED SONG [25]

[TIA DOBSON

PROMISES [29]

SAPIOSEX [30]

SHOOTING STARS [31]

[ALEXIS HENDERSON

CHILDREN OF THE GODS [36]

[BRENDA HILL

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE [38]

[CIERA LOVE

DECEMBER FELT LIKE JULY WITH YOU [50]

DOMINANT DISTANT DREAMS [51]

ENGAGING NOSTALGIA [52]

NEWTON'S THIRD LAW [54]

1:46 IN THE AFTERNOON [55]

Px [56]

PENDULUM HEIGHTS [57]

SAY YOU WILL TOO [58]

A SIDE OF SAVANNAH [59]

THE CIVIL WAR [60]

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO US? I'M WAITING ON YOU. [61]

[ADAM TRAWICK

FERIA [65]

PLUMING [66]

[JONATHAN WILFORD

I CAN'T (LIE THE WAY YOU DO) [72]

ME MINUS YOU [74]

022 [YOU ARE HERE

JESSLYN CRANER]

[26] SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND

RODRICK 'PC' DUNHAM]

[32] SLAVES

NI'ASIA HAZELTON]

[34] BLACK HOPE

BILL LISBON]

[40] A SIGN FROM THE GODS

[41] ERASER

[42] GHOST, GHOST ... 'TIL WE TORE IN TWO

[43] HEARTBURN

[44] HOW MY MIND WORKS

[46] INSERT

[47] LAST GASP

[48] READ MY LIPS

[49] THE LONELINESS OF A SHORT-DISTANCE RUNNER

EMILY MILLER]

[62] MAJOR ENGLISH

CODY SOLDERS]

[64] BUDDY

KAT TRENT]

[68] FALLING OVER

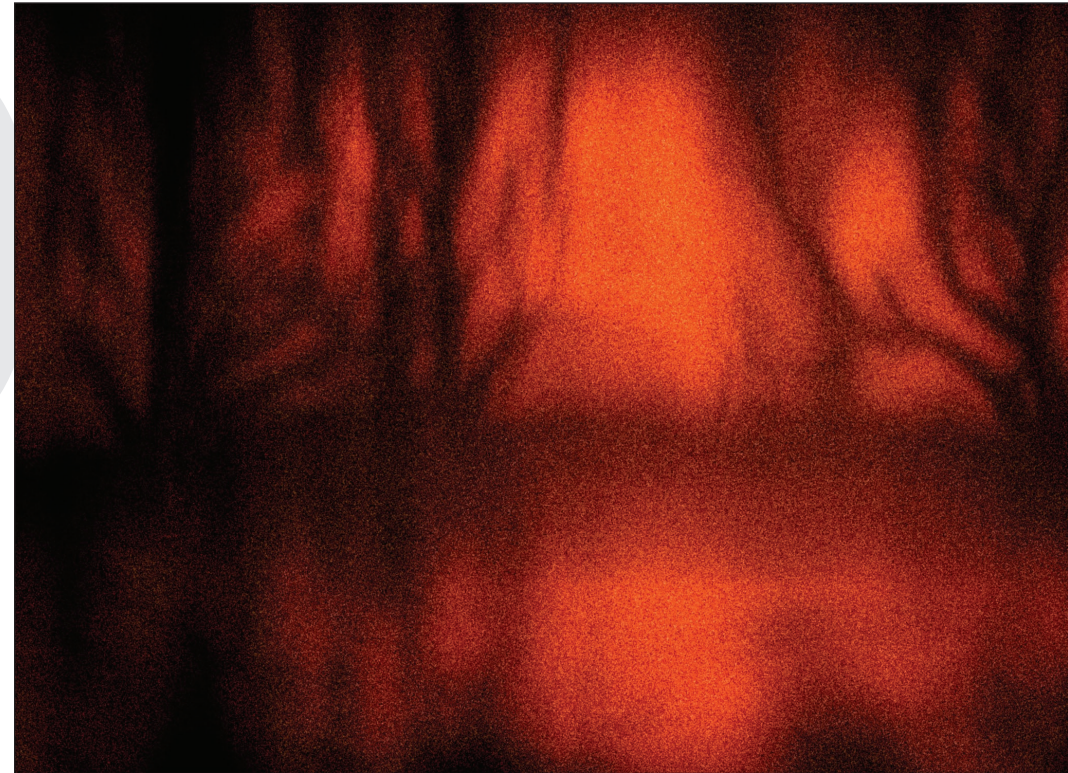
[69] HANDCUFFED

[70] WRAPPED UP IN LOATHING

CALLIE YOUNG]

[75] BOTTLED CHAOS

POETRY



MURMURING

IMAGERY FOR EDGAR ALLAN POE'S 'THE LAKE'

Alternative Digital Photography by Erin Cline

ARE YOU SICK OF IT?

Interruptions that never cease,
 Defecting sanity with destructive pastimes.
 Turbulent thoughts that collide
 With necessary complications and depictions,
 Providing escape from reality.
 Illusions cascade; a demented
 Waterfall finding fault in every crevice
 It tortures and petrifies the energy expended
 In search for level ground to breach.
 Bias and prejudice that insist on
 Voicing nonsense, captivating the
 Fanatic and hosting the vices at tea time.
 Common sense and knowledge head south,
 A flock of starving mallards fleeing disease
 And frozen exhalations of diplomacy
 Entangled in defective minds with faulty knowledge.
 Where, you ask, are the scholars?
 They're railroaded by inconsistency
 Caused by the ever shifting dynamics of
 "social norms" and hypocritical suppositions.
 Didn't you know?

PAINED SONG

I

I want my tears back.
 Back from my scarred soul.
 Back from the displacement of my mind.
 Back from the once held innocence
 that departed at your touch—
 and the knowledge you forced upon me.

II

I want my tears back.
 Back from your appearance.
 Back from my disillusionment.
 Back from the past
 that haunts us both—
 and leaves us in our place.

SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND

So hard to understand unless experienced.
 Bond with others, from respect to care.
 Escape and fight; from a past and for a future,
 And from that future as it becomes the past
 and for that past that has again become the present.
 I do what I have to do because others are driven to as well,
 how can I be left behind,
 But why did I ever want to remember this?
 Finding purpose by receiving and giving direction,
 I am the fringe and the basis
 I was taken out and am now being taken out of.
 No man should bow,
 Was I fighting for that or against it; I have become both of those men.
 Prologue to routine, there are too many to remember to count.
 I get to play with guns,
 But I don't know if this counts as an accomplishment.
 Giving emptiness is not fun,
 The more emptiness I give, the deeper I receive my own void,
 The more raw I become, the more I see, the bigger I feel.
 These comrades are transparent regardless of body or brain,
 I know them and they know me
 and we continue to hold each other together,
 Continue to hold on.
 We can't point to where the pain hurts
 but it can't be generalized either.
 Sometimes I stop and am surprised
 it is there when I was unaware it never left,
 It's a shade of us like we are a section of it—direct, vicarious.
 You try to make it better, tell it lighter, depict it worthier,

Dedication of something stripping you of yourself
 so others are able to be themselves,
 And these others you sacrifice for are sometimes so different
 that it's not worth measuring;
 I fought for those causing me to now fight cynicism
 and aggravation and disgust,
 I come back and I see the petty things, the tiny universes
 of the ignorant, oblivious to their insignificance.
 Some claim to know but they do not understand;
 but if they know this, is it alright—is it considerable?
 They will remain unanswered until they look beyond themselves.
 They use certain words over and over, in each incarnation,
 but eventually I just don't care,
 though I know there are no other words to use,
 They are temporal, finite rows—a small fraction of the others,
 all on longer columns of a bigger web.
 Words are simply the dewdrops on the web's tendrils,
 Illuminating the appeal or idealism or conception
 to be found in something so much bigger and indifferent.
 Even this poem is pointless, still simple romanticism
 despite its desperate effort to explain.
 These terms are dewdrops, not even part of the web, but added
 later—sometimes in vain and sometimes attempting,
 Occasionally truthful, but never true,
 One theory in a world of bodies, history books of voices,
 the identities of tradition, the memories of warriors,
 All at arm's reach.
 So hard to understand,
 Especially comparatively.
 And then when dragged back in, they connect and they work
 and they fight and they do everything again.
 They are sentient souls, they are uninhibited,
 they are free of the constraints of concealment
 In all the ways that matter
 when you're just trying not to die.

I FEEL GOOD

Acrylic and Ink on Canvas by Emily Miller



PROMISES

We'll be great together, I promise
 We're in this together, I promise
 Always and forever, we promised
 Leave you? Never. You promised
 I put my shattered heart in your hands and kept it together,
 bound by the sweet words that you said to me
 Promises that seemed everlasting expired
 because of a few bad dates and words
 we never meant to say to each other
 Are "I love yous" the new hello?
 Do we exchange them more than ill-fitting clothes?
 Since it's impossible to love and be wise
 I finally understand why fools fall in love
 You promised to never hurt me again
 But these scars on my heart shined truth on the situation
 better than any polygraph could
 "You'll never deceive me," you promise
 "Now you need me," you promise
 But you see there is no "us" or "we," I promise
 Because I promised myself, I'll never willingly be hurt again

SAPIOSEX

They say you never forget your first time
 I know I'll never forget mine
 The first time I let someone in my mind
 I let him penetrate the walls that I had built long ago
 And I loved it when he used his head in conversations
 to make me come to my senses
 Piece by piece removing the clothing to my inner being
 I let him admire my naked ambitions and dreams
 like no one had ever seen
 You see to me, sex is easy
 But to arouse the head on his shoulders and make him crave me
 Is a whole new level of intimate ecstasy
 Let's intertwine our minds and see what we find
 No need for protection in this bed of memories that we lie in
 I'd take the risk and chance bringing a newborn love
 in this world that we live in
 No holding back, I want to feel his hopes and dreams flow into me
 And his hidden fears resonate with me
 Stroking ever so gently with his intellect
 I never expected climax at the peak
 of our understanding one another
 To be this transcendental and euphoric
 Not a single touch was physical
 but physics might be a start in explaining
 Why without touching me
 he touched me in ways I never thought possible
 As the convo reaches its plateau, let's do this again sometime

SHOOTING STARS

A shooting star shot me down
 When what I wished for could not be found
 I closed my eyes and visualized
 But yet my wish I did not find
 I waited with patience, with timeless care
 But still my wish wasn't there
 Although my wish was as simple as could be
 Still my wish I could not see
 I got shot down by a shooting star
 But I believe again now because here you are

SLAVES

My head hangs as I see my people enchained.
Whether you're hitchhiking with your hand out on the road to fame,
Or living from check to check, just tryna maintain.
Asked my homie on the corner "Bruh why you slang?"
Is it just a quick buck? Or you tryna make a name?
He said, "Neither. Two things I don't have are paper
or the time to complain.
But I never finished school, cuz we ain't all built the same.
I just wanna feed my kids, and maybe buy myself a chain."
Just then I understood his point but not where to point the blame.
Cuz he's trapped in the Trap, Just a slave to the game.
And he's still dealing with white. Instead of cotton, it's cocaine.
Still working hard for massa, as he prayed for better days.
Now I'm questioning myself and I feel like such a lame.
I be praying for a Lexus. He just prays for bigger plays.
I ain't even payed my rent, but I bet I got them Jays . . .
Told us we could be anything, but they never showed us the way . . .
So until we emancipate our thinking the one thing we will always
remain . . .
. . . is Slaves . . .



WORN

Photo by Ciera Love

BLACK HOPE

I heard the people say
 you'll never amount
 you're a nigger
 they wanted me to fail without
 a doubt

Because of my skin
 I am misunderstood
 I am not the enemy
 the bad names you may call me
 nor am I the history that may
 define me
 I am Black Hope
 the seed that wasn't expected
 to grow
 the other side my ancestors fail
 to show
 I am the life that matters
 the most
 I am Black Hope

I prefer progression not perfection
 For perfection does not exist
 I exist in the midst of the hate
 and the fact that the issue is my race

I am not the "average black" you seem to believe
 sagging pants or dealing drugs
 I am Black Hope
 going to college preparing for a PhD
 I am not the nigger who you always seem to see
 the gangster who is walking the street
 I am Black Hope
 pursuing my dreams

CHILDREN OF THE GODS

Children of the gods slur hymns
Exchanging faithless prayers
In motel cathedrals
Screaming pleas into pillows before
The bright dawn breaks

Ask the man for a prophesy and he will speak
In the two-tongued talk of the gods
The drunken garblings of listless men
The doctrines of tomorrow

Ask the girl to write, she'll scrawl
In the splintered jargon of the common man
Blank verses, empty verses
Poetry rendered in invisible ink



SPLIT THE EVILS

Photo by Ciera Love

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

Hesitancy came naturally
 And fear, it stayed close by.
 Uneasiness prevented my rest,
 I knew the master of lies.
 Determination birthed from aggravation,
 Just tiptoeing through a game
 Of elimination, I still cried.
 Standing, speaking words of hate
 It was too late. You couldn't kill what had died.
 So you back stepped. Turned the wheel
 With no conscience to be found.
 Spineless feet hit the ground.

 A dabble here, a dabble there,
 One strike the sky went red.
 I saw the ghost, he told me.
 My vision was blurred, I bled.
 Unforced tears not enough here
 To quench the hungry flames.
 Never the same. You're the blame.
 Your eight ball and your beer.

A slow drive with Jen and Bob
 From the outskirts of town.
 A time of composure
 Before the disclosure of the final round.
 There in front of nothingness
 The ghost, he was right.
 It took me down. My heart was bound.
 Lost it all with the will to fight.

 Hands of hope helped me cope,
 Morning came things were cool.
 A pool of ashes in the distance,
 There I dug to find my existence.
 Everything that was me was not
 Until I found something in its spot—
 A miniature tea set and a silver dollar.
 I will cut my losses and start again.

GHOST, GHOST ... 'TIL WE TORE IN TWO

here's all that's left
 white tissue 'round a gumball
 and a rubber band

she handed me a ghost
 walking off with another man

go face it alone, I won't sugar-coat
 I hope you understand
 this dead thing won't float
 still swimming but cold
 never touching land

I needed you the most
 your broken twinkle-toes
 once laid in these hands

my now vacant hands

HEARTBURN

Cupid has a partner, an ineluctable shadow,
 who
 creeps up behind you in a parking lot,
 whispers in your ear,
 "You didn't think you'd get away with it, did you?"
 slips between ribs
 a shard of mirror hilted in a dishrag,
 twists,
 and
 spits.

HOW MY MIND WORKS

You smile and celebrate
 watching two young people
 walking slowly on the sidewalk, holding hands,
 and say, "Isn't love magnificent?"

I say, "How do you know
 they're not headed to the hospital
 seeking separation due to some super glue accident,
 or pretending
 because the boy's father is watching from the parking lot
 and he hasn't been able to tell him he doesn't like girls
 because if he knew, his dad would kick him out of the house,
 stop paying his tuition and say 'you're no son of mine'
 while his mother cries in the kitchen
 wondering what she did wrong,
 all the while the girl doesn't know she's being used
 and that when they're alone,
 to keep from gagging,
 he imagines he's kissing that guy in his chemistry class
 who really has a handle on covalent bonds and noble gases
 and matching his belt with his shoes,

or maybe they're just friends
 and he told her something sad that happened to him
 like his grandmother has leukemia
 and the girl took his hand to squeeze
 and he hasn't let go yet
 and it's beginning to get awkward
 but she doesn't want to say anything
 because it's been a long time since anyone's held it
 and he doesn't want to let go
 because secretly his grandmother is fine
 and he just wants to hold on to that hand as long as he can
 because, well, you know what I mean."

And you say, "See?"

INSERT

insert word here
 insert the writer's fear
 insert blank slate
 insert something that rhymes with slate
 insert contemplation
 insert procrastination
 insert condemnation
 insert self-doubt
 insert foot in mouth
 insert gun in mouth
 insert, rewind, revise, repeat
 insert, delete, delete, delete
 insert days into weeks
 insert months into years
 insert the writer's fear

LAST GASP

Tell the assassin to come back tomorrow.
 I'll stand still and bare my neck then.
 Today I need to settle,
 to speak a few words
 I should have said
 but never said
 because if I ever said
 on a day not before my last
 I'd have to live with it
 longer than I could mask.
 For if she heard
 the words
 and turned,
 there'd be no need
 for your hired blade.

READ MY LIPS

everything she says he hears like this
 to useless ears
 from a fully functional mouth
 where still she sounds it out
 only to hear a voice echo to ears unbroken
 to fill a silence chosen
 with a love where now whispers doubt

(Author's Note: this poem was originally written as a performance piece; the presenter only mouths out the words to poem. The audience must either read the lips of the presenter or read the printed poem; they must experience it without sound as if they were deaf.)

THE LONELINESS OF A
SHORT-DISTANCE RUNNER

She always wears boot-cut blue jeans and running shoes.

I wonder where she's dashing to.

If we could change places,
 I'd loosen her laces,
 cause her to pause her races
 long enough to cool her Asics
 and learn the basics.
 A name.
 Claims to fame.
 Which of our differences are the same.
 We'd gain some traction,
 continue the interaction
 hoping for the subtraction of a fraction,
 for her eyes to shift their refraction
 when we compare our favorite singers,
 and laugh from zingers and humdingers,
 finally to exchange a look that lingers,
 and weave our fingers
 tight like glue,
 then drive our faces

into the wind.

DECEMBER FELT LIKE JULY WITH YOU

We walked by each other like strangers do
 but I smelt danger in the familiarity of your perfume
 and again I had been consumed
 by passion
 and what could have happened.
 We should have lasted.

DOMINANT DISTANT DREAMS

I clean the lens of my camera and they pause their lives,
 their stories, for me to capture.
 The shutter sounds and they're still frozen
 in that split second.
 In love. In that room. In their own.
 They are love.
 I look up from my optical zoom and blink a blinding white.
 Not darkness.
 I lift my lids to discover a cheap attempt at a champagne colored wall.
 I lift my head and I'm in my bed.
 In my room.
 In my corner. In lust with their utopia.
 It stops there.
 I stop there.
 Back at me the wall stares.

ENGAGING NOSTALGIA

Remember when the night was still
and the pillows not yet dampened by
thoughts darker than midnight? A fair
exchange for lighter days, right?
Screaming in a black hole.
My eyes red.

I read
that when you talk about it, pain stills.
So much for feeling whole.
I would lie and buy
things on clearance because it felt right.
The price of happiness is fair.

The fare
of a getaway not so much. Red
eye flight it is. Third window seat to the right.
I'm calm still.
I say no goodbyes.
I look straight ahead. On the seat in front, a hole.

This is completely different, apart from the whole.
A rainy day at the fair
but there are hoods; funnel cakes, I buy
you two. A red
ribbon hangs from a still
life portrait in the kindergarten art exhibit. Everything is right.

I write
down memories like this. A whole
book worth of coping, but still
we're just moments on paper. It's not fair.
Waiting to be read.
Time ticks, I'm on standby.

Detrimental states not yet felt by
me, but I can change that myself, right?
This. My eyes aren't quite red
yet. I'm not screaming in a black hole.
The moment fair.
The night still.

Recall the time you said goodbye, wholly?
You drove right on afterwards, you paid the fare,
Go on red. Nostalgia will still.



hi, 42 pills
 for a couple of bills
 that won't heal
 but will
 allow it to feel
 better

existence tethered
 addiction weathered society
 that pries and pleads
 to watch us bleed

but there's nothing more raw
 than coming off a hook you need

pharmaceuticals do with us as you please
 because four or two pills
 for a couple of thrills
 won't begin to heal her
 but she will
 feel

allow her

PENDULUM HEIGHTS

It's time we dread;
 The going towards the light.
 The grey hairs and deathbeds.

"Focus on the right now," they said.
 "The future is one thing we cannot fight."
 It's time we dread.

I should have listened instead.
 I could have picked a daisy, flew a kite.
 So that I would go gentle into my deathbed.

By the clock I was led.
 I tried to live and love despite.
 It's time we dread.

Dead authors I have read.
 None of the greats are in sight.
 Yet their words thrive and they are alive on their deathbeds.

I walk past a penny on heads.
 It keeps me up at night.
 It's time we dread.
 But know everyone picks you on your deathbed.

SAY YOU WILL TOO

I am willing to go with it
 The flow
 Your eyes
 The wind
 Your lies
 If you will too

A SIDE OF SAVANNAH

I didn't have the typical childhood of a writer.
 I had what I wanted and there was no need dire.
 There wasn't much pain I felt and heavy stuff was much lighter
 But my eyes took hold to ignite her.

I'm not sure what it takes to be a poet
 But it poses a threat the deeper I go with it.
 The pen sharpens the more I write with it.
 Sanity is dark and it's tainting to my righteousness.
 Suicide is wrong, right? It's hard to fight with this.

Houston Drive, you drive my psyche to civil war.
 Remembering enough to not want to recall more.

I just want to be called a writer.
 Call me a princess and I'll call you a liar.
 Tell me to follow the light and I'll fall into fire.
 Teach me love and passion and I'll admit that the fact is,
 I can't.
 My rhymes, half and slant,
 never got me anywhere.
 So call me a poet and ask me why I wrote it
 and call up 5 year old me
 and tell her that the world is not empty.

 THE CIVIL WAR

blank white pages
 writing stages
 my speaker ages
 the white page rages
 words are potent
 be a potion
 put the stagnant in motion
 lotion them with poetry
 and hopefully they won't recede
 back to raging white pages
 days just spent brainstorming
 thunderstorming in my wonderstorm
 it's my usual
 checking for form
 the page is torn but
 I'm cozy here
 I'm warm
 worn out from this costly battle with white pages
 and tight faces
 from everyone who believes I'm doodling in a
 major that won't offer me minimum wages
 but I argue,

 my blank page wages

 WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO US?
 I'M WAITING ON YOU.

Don't.

MAJOR ENGLISH

The first book I stole was a Shakespeare anthology
 You make my heart beat double time, iambic pentameter
 Longing for magic, Prospero
 Throwing fists for the first time, Hamlet
 Loving and learning, clichés, Sonnet 18
 You were lightning and I, I was
 the world at ten trying to handle the strike

I was named after the Brontë sister
 Who built a dynasty on the back of her only book
 Black hair and deep eyes, that was Emily
 I was named after Dickinson,
 Hiding in her room with too many words to give out
 Lowering gifts to the children even though
 She was hurting,
 The Emilys, the wordsmiths, from birth,
 that was me

Known for the head she stuck in the oven
 but not the beauty inside of it,
 Sylvia Plath, a mother, a wife, strife, and grief
 I have Lady Lazarus tattooed over my heart,
 Still listen to your reading of Daddy,
 Writing the ending of your life so many times
 It helped me start mine, the first time I saw depression
 and creativity in the same hand

An inventor of an entire genre, Mary Shelley
 No one like you, nothing like you, even after
 Percy Shelley struck out your words, you still had power
 Seventeen and a writer like no other, heart, soul
 Death, life, you knew it all,
 you wrote it all and it was yours

The Lost Generation, war vets and drunk women
 God, the soul, the heart, the hurt,
 It's beauty and fake gold, plastic diamonds falling in
 Cheap champagne, Zelda Fitzgerald's works ripped out
 Under the claim of crazy, they knew how to party
 and by god, they hit with the best of them

I've been chasing books since three and writing them since six
 I want to be grand, I never want these ink stains to come
 Out my heart, but sitting in those big shadows
 as a witness to the world will be just fine

BUDDY

It has been a while since we last spoke,
 Man, it has been a long while,
 Do you still mind if I smoke?
 Man, it seems our distance has gained another mile.

Yes, my family is doing ok,
 Man, do these seasons go really fast,
 It seems like everything is always on replay,
 This talk sure has been a blast.

Same time next year I will visit you,
 Man, it seems it gets harder and harder on my bones,
 Just taking a moment to visit you,
 While I place your favorite flowers next to your stones.

FERIA

AN INFERENCE REACHED FROM 'VULGUS' AND 'PARTURIATE'

Impecunious,

the peripatetic
 ruminating—
 his punctum
 shed a teary thought—

the fecundity of halcyon days:

Vestiges of heliolatry
 among the
 cobblestone street.

Shattered sun,

hoofing adagio
 upon the wine-dark
 sea.

—*Atelier! Maya, the inveigling clou.*

PLUMING

A plume

of white smoke,
outlined in gray,
plumed from the chimney
and was swept away.

The cold rushing air,
damp but swift,
swept through the streets
gilded leaves they lift;

guided and driven
by invisible force
happenstance landings
to grounds they marry and divorce.

Smoke still plumes
from the chimney today
its stirring scent rises
round where the gods play.

Echoes of song,
the locals sing and say,
of a life none knew
but for whispers of hearsay:

—Mrs. O'Donnoghue,
*crimson was her hair,
her final sleep fell by the hearth
in her husband's rocking chair.*

*Rest easy, O' you
with hair of rose and fire,
though no one knew
of your use entire;*

*for it is said: of ash we come,
and to ash we go,
the plumes of our souls
seen, then swept as so.*

FALLING OVER

Glistening beneath the clouded moonlight pale
with a rumble and clear drops dripping down.
I stand and slowly exhale.

The wind flows around me like a veil
whipping about, making my hair a thorn crown.
It glistens beneath the clouded moonlight pale.

My hands embrace my arms, so frail
The air so thick it feels I might drown.
I stand and quickly exhale.

I crouch down low and think of my derail,
a bloodied, ripped up bridal gown
It glistens beneath the clouded moonlight pale.

Now I watch the bottom of it flail
the ends once pure white now a begrudging brown
I stand and sharply exhale.

With a thought to become a tale
and my eyes over the cliff, I'm around.
Glistening beneath the clouded moonlight pale.
I lay and never exhale.

HANDCUFFED

Swift turns and potholes like
buckets—we glide down icy roads.
Entrapped by icicles that hang
off trees and pressured by
mountains that loom in hazy
storms of snow. We travel
down these icy roads. Hold
fast to the steering wheel that
burns our hands, the chill vaporized
within our breaths. Pull the
blankets tighter, for we still
must go down these icy roads together.

WRAPPED UP IN LOATHING

Whispers bring me closer to you.
Holding me in indulgent delight.
My lucky clover, that green hue.

Tingles of touches makes me run into
the past. The shrouded night
where whispers bring me closer to you.

Whipping of tears that turn my face askew
hearing promises that everything will be all right.
My lucky clover, that blue hue.

Pushes and pulls fly through
and around corners painted pure white,
whispers pull me farther from you.

Please let me come to
where the clouds and sun fight.
My lucky clover, that yellow hue.

I must not pursue
or else you leave and I become contrite.
Whispers pull you farther from me,
my lucky clover, that clear hue.



SAFE/UNSAFE

Photo by Bill Lisbon

I CAN'T (LIE THE WAY YOU DO)

I'm not your good morning goodbye
 I'm not your one night standby
 I'm not the one you just let get by
 I'm not the one, I'm not your lover boy

Fuck the scene, it's not me
 Fuck the bar and the club and the venue
 Fuck the hipster spot it killed me
 I can't lie the way they do

I'm not your morning after pill
 I'm not the one you wished would've stayed
 I'm not your 3 day call rule
 I won't be the reason, I won't be your slave

Fuck the scene, it's not me
 Fuck the bar and the club and the venue
 Fuck the emo spot it killed me
 I can't lie the way they do

Little lies shouted over deafening sounds
 Emotions found to be withered
 And when you go home your still empty inside
 Just like the words that fall around you

I'm not your good morning goodbye
 I'm not your one night standby
 I'm not the one you just let get by
 I'm not the one, I'm not your lover boy

Fuck the scene, it's not me
 Fuck the bar and the club and the venue
 I can't lie the way you do
 I can't lie the way you do
 I can't lie the way you do
 I can't live
 I can't love

ME MINUS YOU

Above, below, beyond and clear through,
standing beside me, a reflection of you.

Blood in your eyes, smoke in the lung,
bursting from the seam, emotionally hung.

Laying down inside me, me inside you,
sinking in deeper, matching more true.

Stained with passion, torn betwixt faith and love,
fading out, then back in, not knowing what's to come.

Generating motion, spiritually speeding on by,
intoxicating notion, physically leading us awry.

Banging in my brain, stomping my senses,
dulling me down, fogging up the lenses.

Push me into a pull as I jump into a trip,
stagnant waters finally run free, drip by drip.

Back in my body, once again alive,
black out the white and I once again die.

Raise from the ashes and shine like the sun,
looking up from the brink, once again one.

Salvation tiptoeing ever closer still,
I'm embracing this now, and forever I will.

BOTTLED CHAOS

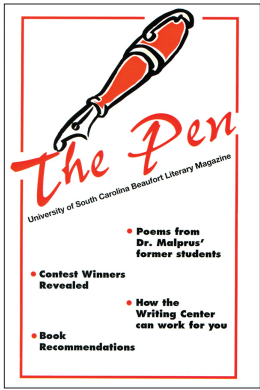
We are bottled chaos
Maturing, learning, conforming
We leak, spew, and explode
Leaving devastation and destruction in our wake

We are bottled chaos
Dangerously compacted
Close to cracking
The glass betraying, contaminating

Our methods may differ
It's our insanity that's in sync
Tighten the cap,
Control me more

There are millions of us
No one you can trust

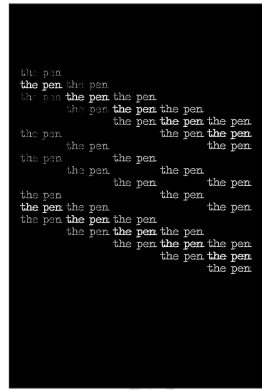
We are bottled chaos



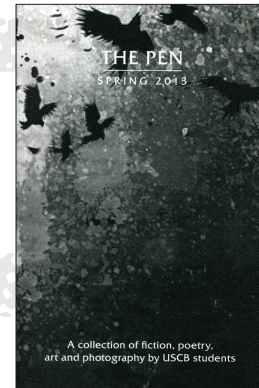
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Fall 2007



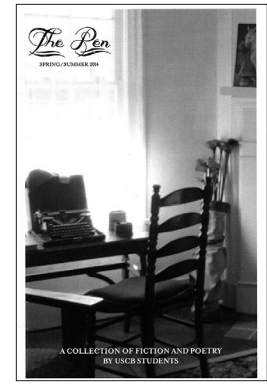
2008



Spring 2013



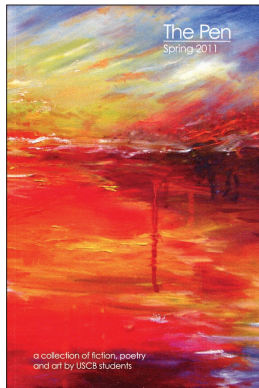
Fall 2013



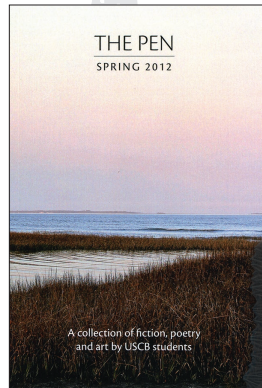
Spring / Summer 2014



Fall 2010



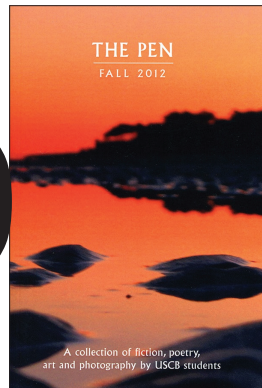
Spring 2011



Spring 2012

COVER GALLERY

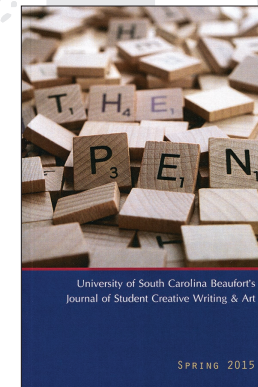
Since 2006, University of South Carolina Beaufort's Society of Creative Writers has published *The Pen*. Here's a look back at the covers of all our past editions, which are available at both USCB libraries and at <http://www.uscb.edu/pen>.



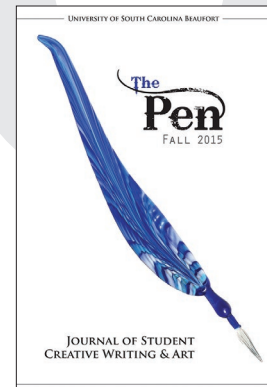
Fall 2012



Fall 2014



Spring 2015



Fall 2015

WON'T WORRY

IMAGERY FOR JASON MRAZ'S *THE REMEDY*

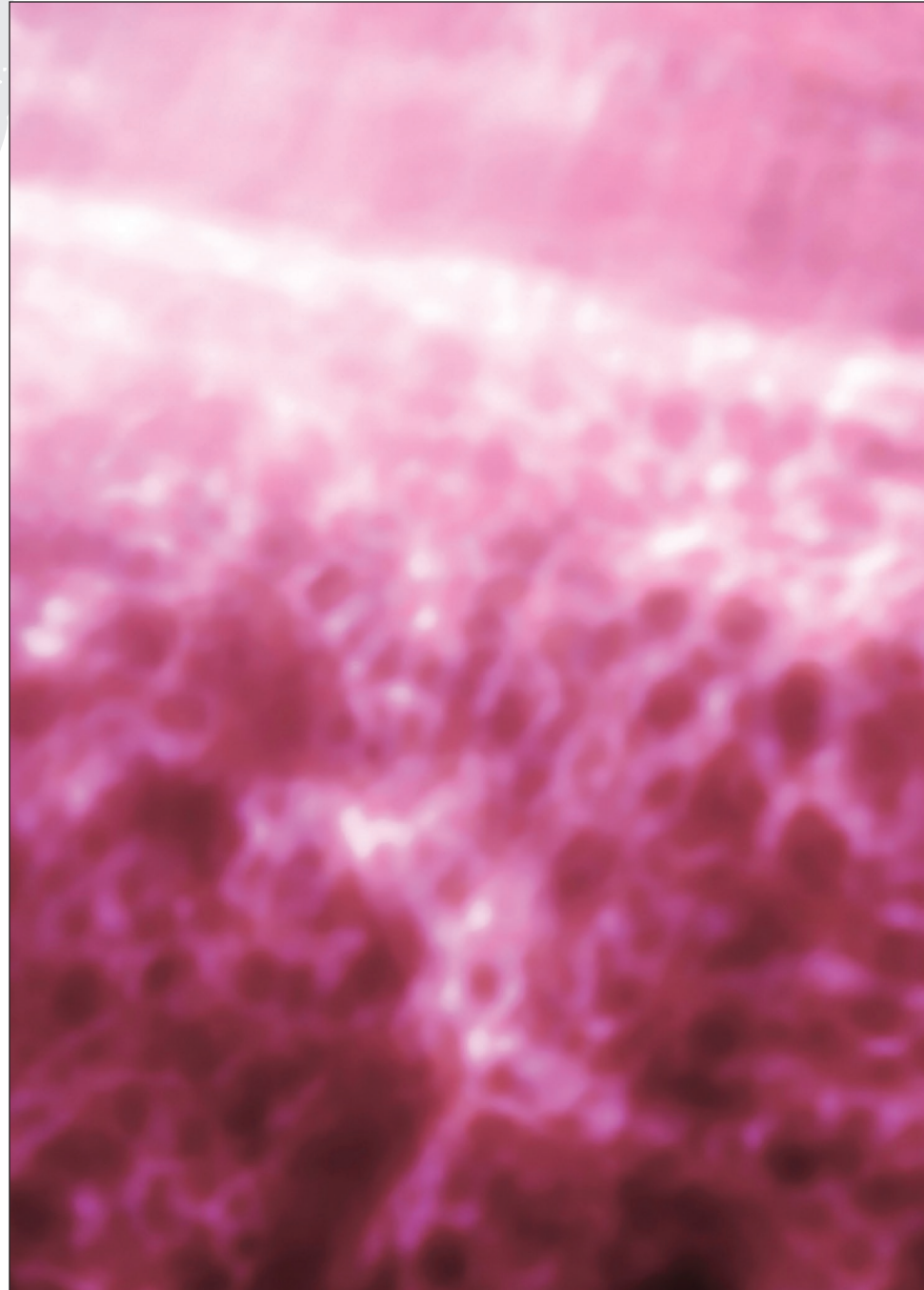
Alternative Digital Photography by Erin Cline

078 [YOU ARE HERE

BILL LISBON]
Tagalong [080

DRAMA

[KAT TRENT
087] Next Wednesday?



TAGALONG

Characters

SIMON – early 30s, dressed in a nice suit

GENE – 23, dressed a little shabby, tie, no jacket

FRONT DESK CLERK #1 – woman, pleasant

FRONT DESK CLERK #2 – woman, annoyed

BOUNCER – a man you don't want to mess with

GUEST – any variety

DIRECTOR – man, 40s

DIRECTOR #2 – man, 40s

(Night. A hotel lobby separated into three areas: a front desk, the entrance to an off-stage bar and a sitting area.

SIMON and GENE enter, coming from a wedding reception at a different location, approaching the front desk.)

GENE: Maybe we can get room service.

SIMON: Gene, this is a Holiday Inn. They don't have room service.

GENE: Oh. ... Yeah, I know.

SIMON: Listen, Gene, just stop talking, alright? I've got to check in.

(SIMON and GENE get in line at hotel's front desk, where GUEST is being helped by the FRONT DESK CLERK #1.

FRONT DESK CLERK #2 is also present, but appears busy with something.)

FRONT DESK CLERK #1: I'll be right with you, gentlemen.

GENE: Are you mad at me? You barely said anything during the drive over here.

SIMON: Yes, I'm mad.

GENE: What did I do?

SIMON: *(shaking head)* Forget about it.

GENE: *(shrugs shoulders)* OK.

SIMON: You invited yourself along.

GENE: Everybody wanted me to come. You heard them at the reception.

SIMON: That's not the point.

GENE: What's wrong? You have a room. Why can't I crash with you?

SIMON: Do you have a change of clothes? No.

GENE: It's only one night.

SIMON: Again, not the point.

GENE: Then enlighten me, Simon.

SIMON: Do you remember the time six or seven years ago when everyone went up to the lake? And you and Mom and Rachel could only come up just for the weekend. You knew you were going to be there for at least three days, but you didn't even bring a change of clothes. You literally packed your swim trunks, a towel and a toothbrush and maybe—maybe—a change of underwear.

GENE: I packed more than that.

SIMON: Then you got all mad that we wouldn't let you stay with us for the rest of the week. I remember the picture we took of all of us in front of the cottage. Everyone is smiling, even Rachel, and you've got this scowl on your face...

GENE: How was I supposed to feel?

SIMON: ... and you were wearing my red T-shirt. And tomorrow morning, you'll be wearing one of my T-shirts.

(GUEST moves away from front desk.

SIMON approaches,

GENE hangs back.)

FRONT DESK CLERK #1: How can I help you?

SIMON: I have a reservation. Simon Miller.

FRONT DESK CLERK #1: *(CLERK searches data base)* Yes, Mr. Miller. We have you down for a non-smoking king for one night with the Gibson wedding.

SIMON: That's right, but I was hoping I could change that to a double. I apologize.

FRONT DESK CLERK #1: That shouldn't be a problem, sir, just let me check...yes, I have one available.

SIMON: Thank goodness.

FRONT DESK CLERK #1: Here are your keys. Room 238. Check-out is at 11. Enjoy your stay.

SIMON: *(to GENE)* Come on. Let's get in there.

(SIMON and GENE cross the lobby and approach the door to the bar, where BOUNCER is posted. SIMON hands ID to BOUNCER, who checks it and nods approval. SIMON enters bar. GENE tries to follow SIMON without showing ID and is stopped by the BOUNCER.)

BOUNCER: ID?

GENE: I don't have it on me.

BOUNCER: I can't let you in without an ID.

GENE: Come on. I'm 23 years old. That's my brother you just let in.

BOUNCER: Your brother had an ID.

(SIMON returns after seeing that GENE hasn't come in.)

SIMON: What's going on?

GENE: They won't let me in.

SIMON: What?

BOUNCER: He doesn't have an ID.

GENE: I left it at home.

SIMON: *(to BOUNCER)* Listen, sir, I can attest that he's over 21.

BOUNCER: Sorry, bar policy. No ID, no entry.

SIMON: Can't you give him a wristband or put an "X" on his hand or something?

BOUNCER: No one under 21 is allowed inside.

GENE: But I'm 23.

(SIMON debates going back inside and leaving his brother outside, but eventually takes GENE back into the lobby sitting area.)

SIMON: I don't believe this.

GENE: I'm sorry. I didn't think I'd need it.

SIMON: What? You willingly left your wallet at home?

GENE: So?

SIMON: So? First of all, you don't leave home without your ID. Secondly, you crossed a state line to come to this wedding. You probably broke some law. And then you talk yourself into staying up here so you can go to the after-party—in a bar—knowing damn well you didn't have your ID.

GENE: I didn't think I'd need it.

SIMON: That's right, you didn't think. You never think. Tell me, how were you even going to pay for drinks?

GENE: I have \$10.

SIMON: You thought to bring cash, but not your wallet?

GENE: I borrowed it from Mom.

SIMON: And that's probably all she had, too.

GENE: I don't know.

SIMON: Unbelievable.

GENE: Why are you so upset?

SIMON: Because it seems every time I come home, I'm looking into a crystal ball and seeing my future. It's tough enough knowing that I'm going to have to take care of Rachel one day, but with her it's not like she can do anything about it. I shouldn't have to carry you. I will, but I shouldn't. I mean, aren't you ashamed of yourself?

GENE: Why should I be?

SIMON: You're 23 years old. You live at home. You never went to college. You have a dead-end job. You have to borrow beer money from your mother?

GENE: Hey, I don't have it easy like you.

SIMON: Easy? I work hard. I had to bust my butt washing dishes to pay my way through college. I didn't have any help to get where I am from them or anybody.

GENE: You know they could barely make ends meet, let alone paying your tuition.

SIMON: I never asked them to pay for my tuition. I know how poor they are.

GENE: But you left.

SIMON: That's what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to leave. You grow up.

(Enter DIRECTOR, waving his hands.)

DIRECTOR: Guys. Guys, let's pause there for a second.

GENE: *(now with a British accent)* What's the matter, Greg? That felt quite good to me.

SIMON: I think I messed up the "borrow beer money" line.

DIRECTOR: It's not you guys. That was really great. It was fine. I'm just coming to realization that the script is not working for me. For example, Gene and Simon just go on and on for another 10 minutes in an argument that never truly resolves itself.

SIMON: I thought that was the point. It's real like that. All postmodern and shit.

DIRECTOR: Maybe. But I think it's more like the playwright started down a road without a destination and was too stubborn to give up. Which is why it ends the way it does.

GENE: My problem is with Gene's evolution. And if you recall, I did bring this up before. Gene can't begin the play as some sort of freeloading dunce and suddenly try to become sympathetic to the audience because he wants to repair a relationship Simon doesn't want to be a part of.

SIMON: But Simon's character is working well.

DIRECTOR: Maybe too well. We know Simon is mad at his brother for not pulling his weight and that he isn't taking steps to escape his parents' legacy. And Simon feels betrayed by that.

GENE: Plus Gene never provides a clear reason for why he isn't trying to improve his station in life. It's too one-sided and the argument never comes into balance.

SIMON: But Simon seems like the type of person who would be able to snowball anyone in a logical argument.

DIRECTOR: Which makes it a good speech, not a piece of drama. Anyway, the elephant in the room is the stabbing.

GENE: Exactly. Why would Simon stab Gene in the middle of a hotel lobby?

SIMON: Because he's reached his breaking point. Am I the only one

who sees the Cain and Abel symbolism here?

GENE: Cain kills Abel because he's jealous of God's love, not because he's disappointed in him. Anyway, you were just defending Simon for his logical thinking.

DIRECTOR: Ugh. What was I thinking trying to stage this play?

SIMON: What were you thinking?

DIRECTOR: I don't know. I liked the cover letter. The playwright knew we had pair of cats named Rosencrantz and Guildenstern living in the theater. He'd only know that if he read the theater history page on the website.

GENE: I'm allergic to cats.

SIMON: I tried out for "Cats."

(Beat.)

DIRECTOR: I'm sorry. I forget my next line.

(Enter DIRECTOR #2 with a script on a clipboard.)

DIRECTOR #2: The line is "Oh, that reminds me. Both of my Corgis are pregnant."

DIRECTOR: Right. Right. Why can't I remem-

SIMON: *(taking off wig and now speaking in a Scottish accent)* Can we take a break? I really need a cigarette.

(SIMON exits. DIRECTOR paces around stage, mouthing his lines, silently rehearsing.)

GENE: *(no longer in a British accent)* *(To DIRECTOR #2)* Richard. A word, please. *(pulls DIRECTOR #2 away from everyone for a private conversation.)* Richard, this isn't working and you know it. *(looks back at DIRECTOR)* He's a no-talent hack who can't even remember a handful of lines.

DIRECTOR #2: He'll be fine by Friday.

GENE: No he won't. Fire him already and let Clancy step in.

DIRECTOR #2: You know I can't fire him. His wife is footing the whole bill for this production, and she's on the city council. I already pissed her off by not giving him the lead.

GENE: I'm sorry it has to come to this, but it's either him or me. I have a reputation to keep.

DIRECTOR #2: *(with increasing anger)* Jesus Christ. Fine. Leave. Screw

us all over. Don't worry. Your reputation as a prima donna son of a bitch who couldn't make it on Broadway is secure.

(GENE *exits.*)

DIRECTOR #2: (*throwing down clipboard*) That's it. The show's cancelled. Shut it down. Shut it all down.

(DIRECTOR #2 *storms off stage.*)

DIRECTOR *and* FRONT DESK CLERK #1 *look at each other confused and walk off stage together.*

(BOUNCER *walks over to* FRONT DESK CLERK #2 *and leans on the counter beside her.*)

BOUNCER: I wish we wouldn't let them rehearse in the lobby.

FRONT DESK CLERK #2: (*shaking head in disgust*) Actors.

(*End.*)

Kat Trent

NEXT WEDNESDAY?

Characters

ALICE – woman, 24, blonde, thin

JAMES – man, 26, greasy brown hair, thin, unimposing

(*Scene opens on a woman, ALICE, sitting at a table in a restaurant by herself. She is playing with her cell phone, and fidgeting. A man, JAMES, walks up to the table.*)

JAMES: Is this seat taken?

ALICE: Not at all. (*motions for him to sit*)

JAMES: Are you waiting for someone?

ALICE: Nah. I was just checking the time. (*pause, uncomfortable silence*)

JAMES: So, um, want to get something to eat? I'll treat you.

ALICE: That would be great, hun.

JAMES: (*whispers*) Don't call me that.

ALICE: (*whispers*) Shit, sorry.

JAMES: What would you like?

ALICE: A slice of their cheesecake would be lovely.

JAMES: Alright. I'll go get it.

(*He gets up. ALICE goes back to checking her phone, a grimace upon her face. JAMES comes back shortly.*)

Back at that phone I see. Are you sure you aren't waiting for someone?

ALICE: I promise. Where's the cheesecake?

JAMES: They said they would bring it over shortly. Would you tell me more about yourself?

ALICE: (*pauses, then speaks as if she is trying to remember*) I really like movies—psychological thrillers really, and video games, and ... um ... anime. Yeah, I love those.

JAMES: What a coincidence! I do too. What is your favorite movie?

ALICE: (*whispers*) What was it again?

JAMES: (*whispers back*) Seriously? Seven!

ALICE: It would definitely be Seven. I loved how Kevin Spacey played out the villain. He was just so creepy.

JAMES: I also really like that one. The ending has to be one the best, you know, when Brad Pitt figures out what's in the box. Gets me every time.

ALICE: Yeah. Great movie.

JAMES: It really was one of those generation changing movies. It was art. I feel like most movies that have come out since have just been piss poor in their story telling, and damn it, I want more movies that have some substance. Sure, there have been a few that have broken from that mold, but most don't. Hell, look at the horror genre. They all follow the same exact story line with the same tropes and it's boring. Boring and unartistic.

(*Long silence. ALICE starts checking her phone again.*)

What are you doing? Put that down.

ALICE: (*flustered*) Shit! Sorry. So ... How about those video games?

JAMES: Yeah. What are some of your favorites?

ALICE: Um, Bioshock, and uh ... you know, the list is just so long that I really can't think of anymore. They will come to me.

JAMES: Understandable. Bioshock is one of my favorites too. The world they created was so original and inspired.

ALICE: The masks were pretty cool too.

JAMES: Which was your favorite?

ALICE: The bunny. I love bunnies.

JAMES: Cause it was creepy, right? Not just cause you like bunnies, right?

ALICE: Mhm! Of course!

JAMES: Good. I thought you were just pretending there for a moment.

ALICE: Why would I ever do that? I just love video games.

JAMES: (*whispering*) Drop the sarcasm.

ALICE: (*whispering*) Fine. Sorry.

JAMES: What is your favorite gaming console?

ALICE: N64 is pretty nice.

JAMES: It really is. Gives you a way to play games with your friends and it really has some of the best ones out there.

ALICE: Yup. So original.

JAMES: Do you have a favorite?

ALICE: (*offhanded*) I played Mario Party as a kid. Guess that would have to be it.

JAMES: (*excited*) Really?! That's awesome! I played it too! (*whispers*) You seriously played it? Cause I didn't tell you about that.

ALICE: (*whispers*) Does it even matter?

JAMES: (*whispers*) Fine. Okay.

ALICE: (*whispers*) Let's get this over with.

JAMES: (*whispers*) What did I tell you about talking to me like that? (*silence*)

ALICE: (*whispers*) I won't do it again.

JAMES: Good. Now I really want to play that game. You should come over some time so we can. It would be like a blast to the past. An epic journey through our childhoods once more. (*ALICE checks her phone*) Man that makes me remember those blisters I would always get in the middle of my palm. Those always hurt like hell and made it so hard for me to write it class. I wouldn't trade any of those memories away. (*pause*) What did I tell you about that phone, ALICE?

ALICE: (*freezes*) I was just checking the time. Five more minutes. Sorry.

JAMES: I don't care about the time, or what's remaining of it. Get your shit together. Stop fucking this up for me.

ALICE: Okay. I won't.

JAMES: Good girl.

ALICE: (*whispers*) I really can't remember that last topic ...

JAMES: (*voice briefly raises*) Are you kiddin—(*whispers*) You are shit at this. Anime. Get it right this time.

ALICE: (*mumbles*) Sure sure, cause you gotta get your money's worth.

JAMES: What was that?

ALICE: Nothing. So, what's your favorite anime?

JAMES: Blast of Tempest. It is true literature. It combines my favorite

form of entertainment with the beautiful lyricism of Shakespeare.

ALICE: Mhm.

JAMES: It really is amazing that they could combine *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*. So many twists and turns. What is your favorite?

ALICE: (*soft sarcasm*) What a coincidence! Mine just happens to be the same. I just can't believe how many things we have in common. It is just so unnatur—

JAMES: (*calm rage*) Excuse me? Shut your fucking mouth. Follow what I told you. One more strike and you are out. Get it? (*pause*) Good. Back to what I was saying. I really liked that show more than any book I have ever read. Nothing has captivated me more. The plot twists and turns are beautifully crafted and elegant. A master piece if I do say so myself. Don't you agree?

ALICE: Yeah. It's the best.

JAMES: I knew you would agree. I'm glad we are so alike. It's like I actually know the real you, not some mask you put on. It's so nice to meet someone who is like me.

ALICE: Mhm. I bet.

JAMES: You bet?

ALICE: I-I mean, I know. It's just so nice. I'm glad you found me.

JAMES: Me too. It just makes me feel warm on the inside, you know?

ALICE: Yup. Same feeling here.

JAMES: I'm glad we agree.

ALICE: That cheesecake sure is taking a while.

JAMES: So? It gives us more time to talk. You should be happy about that.

ALICE: Of course I am, but I'm also a little hungry. Could you check on how long it'll take?

JAMES: Fine. I'll be right back. (JAMES *exits*)

ALICE: (*quickly takes out phone, whispers to self*) Fuck! What did I get myself into this time? Of course he's a goddamn lunatic. Only a lunatic would want this. Okay, breathe. You can do this. Only a few more minutes, then this is done. I can do this. (*puts phone away*)

JAMES: (*re-enters*) I'm glad your phone wasn't out again. It would be a shame if it was.

ALICE: I know, right? (*softly laughs*)

JAMES: They said they were out, so they are making some more right now. It may take a while.

ALICE: Oh, okay. Makes sense. I guess it's been pretty busy today. So, where were we?

JAMES: You can't remember?

ALICE: (*pause*) Was it video games?

JAMES: You stupi—no. It was not. Think harder.

ALICE: (*pause*) Um ... Wh—was it anime?

JAMES: Good girl. You got it right. Only took two fucking tries.

ALICE: I'm sorry, okay?

JAMES: You better be.

ALICE: So, anime. Do you have another favorite?

JAMES: Actually I do! I really like this one called *Terror in*—(*timer goes off*) What the fuck was that?

ALICE: That signaled that time is up.

JAMES: You timed this?

ALICE: Time is money. So pay up.

JAMES: Fine. (*slides her an envelope*) The rest of the money, as promised.

ALICE: Good. Should I count it to make sure?

JAMES: Who the fuck do you—

ALICE: No. You don't get to do that shit anymore. You are on my time. And I will leave when I want, and say what I want.

JAMES: Just like the whore that you are.

ALICE: How kind of you. You do know my profession.

JAMES: Who wouldn't? Look at you.

ALICE: Good point, sweetie. So instead of giving me some kind of fucking twisted script to memorize, maybe you should go to an actress. Not a whore. Get it right.

JAMES: (*mumbles*) All the same.

ALICE: What did you say?

JAMES: I said you are all the same.

ALICE: (*clicks tongue*) Now, see, that's where you're wrong. Whores are good for the bed, actresses are good for the stage. Like night and day really.

JAMES: But you both act.

ALICE: I guess you are right about that, hunny. But it's what we do that differs.

JAMES: Just leave.

ALICE: You got it. *(gets up)* Oh, by the way? Horror movies suck, video games are boring, and don't get me started on anime. No wonder you came to me. Begging, pleading for a fake first encounter. You didn't even get it right. Names come first, hun.

JAMES: *(sarcasm)* If you know so much then why not change professions?

ALICE: Now now, there's no need for that. As for your question? I like what I do, so why change.

JAMES: Leave.

ALICE: Fine. *(walks out, a moment passes before she comes back to the table)*
We did so well, James!

JAMES: Alice, you were amazing.

ALICE: You really had me convinced. You really sounded like a psychopath. It gave me chills!

JAMES: Right back at you. At the end there, you really could have convinced me that you had joined that kind of job. *(both laugh)*

ALICE: That really took forever to get right.

JAMES: Yeah, but we did it, and even you have to admit we are ready for my show now. But we still need some more practice, how about we meet here again next Wednesday?

ALICE: That sounds great. Next Wednesday.

JAMES: See you then.

ALICE: You got it! *(ALICE exits)*

JAMES: *(silence until she leaves)* She's gonna make a perfect addition to my collection. Even played the part better than the actual hooker. Next Wednesday. *(chuckles)*

(End.)

The Pen is a biannual publication of the Society of Creative Writers, produced under the supervision of the Department of English, Theater and Liberal Studies at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. *The Pen* features the original work of USCB students in the realm of creative writing, which includes primarily fiction and poetry, as well as other creative arts, such as photography and painting. The aim of *The Pen* is to highlight commendable, creative student work and provide students a place where their work may be published with credit.

The University of South Carolina Beaufort's Society of Creative Writers is dedicated to sharing a passion for the written word with like-minded peers. This student-led group allows writers of any experience level to share their work, get constructive criticism and other feedback from classmates, network or just hang out and talk about writing. The group typically meets on campus once a week during the Fall and Spring semesters and holds a public reading at the end of each semester. For more information, email ThePenUSCB@gmail.com or join the public Facebook group titled "USCB Society of Creative Writers."

In order to be considered for publication in *The Pen*, writers must be current USCB students or prior students with no more than two years since their last active semester. Students need not be enrolled in an English or art course to submit work.

All work submitted for publication must be original, unpublished and preferably produced while the writer/artist was a USCB student. Most types of creative writing, art and other expression will be happily considered. ("Fan fiction" will not be accepted.)

There is no limit to the amount of submissions per person, however, writers are expected to send only polished, college-level work. Writing pieces should not exceed 2,500 words each.

All writing pieces must be sent via email, preferably in an attached Microsoft Word document. Ensure work is formatted as it is intended to appear on the page, especially poetry. Each piece should be sent in its own file, and each piece must include a title and the author's name.

While it is *The Pen's* goal to publish work exactly as it is submitted, the editorial staff does reserve the right to edit submissions for publication. Typically, this will include editing for spelling, punctuation, grammar and consistency. Writers should inform the editorial board of any intentional misspellings to avoid unintentional corrections.

All art and photography must be sent via email as a JPEG file no smaller than 5" x 7" at 300 dpi. Artists and photographers must include their name and a title for each entry as well as information on the medium (i.e., oil on canvas, charcoal on paper).

Published writers and artists will be provided with at least one free copy of *The Pen*.

Tentative deadline for the Fall 2016 edition is October 7, 2016.

To submit, or for more information, email the editorial board at ThePenUSCB@gmail.com.

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