TYGR 2016: Student Art and Literary Magazine

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TYGR
2015-2016
art and literary magazine
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Letter from the Editor

ELEMENTS.

I’ve been flooded with emails since we unveiled this year’s theme. Seemingly everyone—from those who chose to submit to those whose names never appeared again—needed to know exactly what that meant. I gave the simplest response I could, one that probably confused people more than it helped: it means, well, everything. You see, our entire world is made up of elements, both literally and figuratively. There are, of course, elements of fire, water, air, and earth. Most of our science majors would look to the periodic table. Our art majors tend to think of the “elements of art,” including color, texture, and space. In mathematics, there is an element of a set. There are elements of fiction, elements of music, elements of engineering electromagnetics. Like last year, we wanted a theme that would be broad enough to unleash the creativity of the student body. Within this publication’s pages, I hope you’ll be challenged to find their connection to “Elements” so that, maybe, your own perception of what makes up our world will be cultivated.

I predict you’ll be impressed by not only the works themselves, but by the evident commitment, sacrifice, enthusiasm, and skill of our fine staff. Every person listed on the TYGR Staff page has put in more hours and artistry than I can adequately describe here, and they deserve special recognition for their dedication to making this publication the best it can be. To my student and faculty readers, thank you for setting aside time in your busy lives to evaluate the submissions we received this year. To our department advisors Professors Forrestal, Greiner, and Kirk, thank you for sharing your wisdom with us as we sometimes bumbled through the process. To our photographers and copy editor, thank you for using your passion for the arts to create something that will last for years to come. To my wonderful assistant editor Luke and layout editor Calli, thank you for always being willing to help me out, heed any concerns or suggestions I had, and get your own jobs done. I sincerely appreciate you all.

Finally, here is TYGR Art & Literary Magazine 2015-2016 for your enjoyment. Thank you for your support of Olivet Nazarene University and the arts. To next year’s ONU students: we fully expect to see your names in the 2016-2017 edition, so get to work!

“Adieu! take care of yourself; and, I entreat you, write!”

BrittLee Cadle

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Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water’d heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?
artwork by
Calli L. Fast
To borrow a book is an intimate affair.  
You loan me a sweatshirt, hoping for it to touch my bare skin,  
But lend me a book and the pages will touch my naked soul  

If you lend me your tome, I will take it to bed  
And caress it sweetly beneath the covers  
As it coos to me secret longings  
Across a sea of sheets  

I'll take it to my secret cove—  
The garden of my heart, where only childhood friends have gathered  
Even they will be snubbed in the name of clandestine rendezvous  
And pillow talk  

Before I reach the last page, the text will have seduced my head  
And ravished my heart  

Lend me a shirt but don't lend me a book  
The shirt will come back with locks of hair,  
The book with my heart pressed between the pages
Why does poetry have to be sad?
It so often is.
Is it some hidden rule?
Poetry that is silly and fun
Is so frequently
Set aside and
Regarded as unfit
For greatness,

But life is not always sad.
It rises.
It falls.
Troubles come and go
Like passing storms
With bright sunlight
On the other side.

It doesn’t mean that the happy times
Are less important than the sad times,
So take a stand.
Write some jokes,
And make them into poetry.
Bring some humor into the world.

So here I go,
Making history,
Changing literature forever.

Knock Knock.
*Who’s there?*
A broken pencil.
*A broken pencil who?*

Never mind. It’s pointless.
I found my heart
inside the devil’s grasp
and I danced around the room
trying to get it back;
I lost.
I paid the cost.
But then a cry came down
behind the sky’s dark mask
and a triumphant hand struck
the brightest match
and as light poured out,
my heart came back;
bruised by its captor.
To the Light Giver I gave it,
because it was all that I had left.
But as he handed it back I realized
I was new.
It rains a lot in Ecuador. I’m not really sure why I was surprised, since most of the country is rainforest, but I wasn’t prepared for it. The bus windows were covered in drops of water that never seemed to stop falling from the sky as we drove deep into the jungle to our destination. The road was narrow and dangerously close to the cliff edge, but nobody else on my team seemed to worry about it, so I put it out of my head. We were getting closer and closer to the Cofan Indian tribes that we were sent to help, driving under waterfalls, over the super sketchy wooden bridges I swear were never meant to hold a bus, and through thickets of trees whose branches drummed on the top and sides of the bus making a great beat. We ignored the rain and tried to sing along with the trees, and genuinely enjoyed ourselves.

We finally made it to the village, and I was both overwhelmed and underwhelmed at the same time. It was exactly what comes to your mind when you hear the word village instead of city or town. The differences were staggering to the eye. The ground was mostly grass and mud, but the mud was a brownish-orange color that looked a lot like puke—which is, I guess, just the general color of the mud in Ecuador.

The houses were made of logs, combined with the same puke mud. Everything looked dirty, and my team and I were supposed to stay here for a week. I had mixed feelings about it. We were there to help out in any way we could, and apparently the best help we could offer was digging holes and moving dirt. For the first few days we dug holes, ate, and played soccer with the locals. They were excited to play with the real soccer ball that Nick had brought with him and were surprised we played the same sport they did. One of the local kids, Juan Carlos, who we called Wonka, always hung out with us. Even when we were working, he would just sit around and speak really bad English, or we would speak really bad Spanish, and fail to communicate. But we didn’t really need to talk. He would just carry around Nick’s soccer ball and throw it at us when he wanted to play. And he threw it at us a lot.

We ended up staying next door to Wonka’s house, and he would invite us over for supper every night. It was an interesting relationship; since verbal communication with the little 10 year old was hard, our communication was based in the universality of our interests. Nick and I were part of the mission trip band, so we had our instruments with us for...
late-night worship. We would play for most of the village, and Wonka would sit in the front row, his eyes wide with wonder, as he saw us play instruments he had never seen before. We as a group only knew a total of about 6 songs all together, so we did a lot of repeats or solo songs that weren't as polished. We played “Grace Like Rain” very often, since that was one we all had mastered and it sounded the best. The Cofan people all knew the word “rain,” and after we taught them the concept of “grace”, they naturally connect to the metaphor of a grace that is like rain.

On the second to last day, we finished moving all the dirt that was supposed to have taken us all week. Wonka immediately pantomimed to us that he wanted to play soccer when he saw us finish. Nick and I let him know we wanted to but that we had to go ask our team leader if we could be dismissed since we finished early. Wonka seemed to understand and ran off to the right side of the village where there was an open field of grass that led into the thick jungle. We found Chris, our team leader, and spoke for a few minutes about what he had to do the next day. Chris told us it was fine to be done until dinner, and we started walking over to where Wonka had run off.
We heard a loud, indistinguishable noise coming from straight ahead. It almost sounded like a horn being blown. We started to jog towards the noise and when we got up on the edge of the hill that overlooked the field, we saw it. My brain didn't initially comprehend what the animal was, but the only word I could find was “monster”. It was dark, and had very big tusks that came out of its face like spears. One of its tusks was darker than the other. I remember vaguely thinking that I was forgetting about something when Nick shouted “Wonka!”

I began searching frantically for our cheerful little friend who might be in danger, when my eyes fell upon a crumpled heap on the ground near the monster.

No. No. No no no, “no no no no no NO”. My thoughts gradually turned into words, and those grew louder and louder as I started running towards Wonka. Nick was right on my heels. The monster seemed confused, and seemed to almost mockingly skip away back into the jungle. It made a loud horn-like noise again, and I hoped that that meant it was leaving.

I slid next to Wonka and took his head into my hands. There was a lot of blood. It seemed to be coming from everywhere. Nick took off his shirt and pressed it onto Wonka’s left side. That must have been where the wound was. Wonka’s eyes were blurred but he was still breathing. I remember that I kept saying “It’s fine. You’re going to be okay. You’re gonna be fine.” He tried to say something a couple times, but it turned into coughs. I begged him not to talk and through my tears, started screaming “Help! We need help!” I don’t know if they already knew what was going on by that time, but I could tell people were coming to help. The sound of rushing people from on top of the hill might have been how I knew. My mind was so fuzzy.

Wonka grabbed my arm with his bloody hand and whispered “Gray rain. Gray lie rain.” I didn’t understand. Nick started to sing all of a sudden. “Halleluiah, grace like rain… falls down on me.” I joined in, and Wonka closed his eyes and listened. His breathing stopped about a minute later. By that time, a bunch of people from the village were coming down the hill with things in their hands and panic on their faces. Nick didn’t know he had died yet, and I didn’t know what to do. We just kept singing through our tears. A local man moved me out of the way and took Wonka’s head the way I had. He looked at me and I nodded, still singing. The rest of my team started to sing along with me. I stopped singing. My face was raining too hard to focus on the words.

It rained a lot that day.
It’s a moment of pure understanding
where fingertips graze over answers
the music in my bones pounds the pew

Humming hallelujahs
honoring three in one
steeped in exultation

Bodies swaying, solo moving rhythms
striking reflections of heaven on earth
until eyes open, instantly losing focus

I’m thrown
outside this state of worship
the woman in front of me scolds her noisy children
two teen mothers walk in
a quarter past nine
and the man wearing the suit is sweating
uneasy and longing to just sit down
while the high schooler sneaks
a quick peek
at the text he just got
Through the window I see
the old friends finishing up their morning smoke
and I can’t help but bask in the sudden sweet surprise
finding myself face-to-face and side-by-side
and deeply nestled within
the church
Looking out upon the glistening water
I am reminded
of the faint memories collected in my brain.

Difficult to let go,
you were all I knew.
Not wanting to forget all that we had.

This rose I hold,
holds too much of me,
too much of you.

So I let it go.
I remember how she used to be.
“You used to be so different,” she tells me now.
I remember how she used to be the serious one, and I was the one who smiled all the time.

“Just look at us in this picture,” she says. We were three years old. She had her arm around me, and I was laughing at something. Maybe our mother had been standing behind the camera to keep us focused. She wasn’t smiling. She looked like a doll – perfectly poised, and perfectly emotionless. She gives a small smile now, a sad one. “I guess we both were different.”

That is the only picture I have of her. Mother burned and hid all the rest.

We hear the teapot whistling downstairs, and she walks to the kitchen to get it. She still walks the same: poised, perfect posture. No stiffness – doesn’t even need a cane. Probably didn’t get arthritis until she was well into her eighties. I wouldn’t be surprised if she didn’t have it at all.

I was always the first one. I was first out of the womb, got my first tooth, took my first step, said my first word, got sick, got my first boyfriend, all before she did. Our parents always said that I’d be the first out of the house too, but they couldn’t possibly have foreseen—

“Do you still take sugar?” she asks as she reenters my room. “Have you ever tried lemon in your tea? Or mint? Both of them together are just divine.” She never waits for my answer. She goes to hand me my tea, black, but instead places it and the saucer on the table next to me after I make no move to take it.

I close my eyes for a few moments and lean my head back against the pillows. I hear her sipping her tea, shifting in her chair. She’s forgotten I don’t like tea. She’s always liked tea. But when she walked into my home earlier today and put the kettle on, I didn’t protest. I didn’t have the strength to try to change her mind. I never have. Nobody ever has.

I used to be the wild one, but she was always the stubborn one. When we were 12, she decided she didn’t want to move to a shanty and that she didn’t want to leave our inner-city apartment, so every day she would walk thirty blocks through the dangerous city and sit on the stoop,
because she couldn’t get into the closed-down building. The first times she did it, we didn’t know where she had gone and so we didn’t know if she was coming back. One time, she tried climbing the fire escape but fell and broke her arm.

After we had just turned 13, our father left to go looking for a job. She refused to believe that his building had burned down, even when the police came and gave us his hat and said that it was the only thing left.

That was when I stopped smiling. That was when she began acting out.
At 15, she met a boy and didn’t come home for five weeks. His name was Leonard. When she and I were close to turning 22, he was sent overseas, and she became a nurse to follow him. I stayed home to help our mother. She worked in a sweatshop, and I was trained as a mechanic. Together, we scraped by. We never received one letter from my twin sister. Eventually, we stopped saying her name.

She showed up to my wedding in 1953 with a three-year-old boy and a swollen belly. She told us that Leonard hadn’t made it out of Dunkirk. I told her that she hadn’t been invited.

And I haven’t seen her for 61 years. She showed up at the nursing home today and asked to see me. I was too weak to answer the nurses, so they let her up anyway. I don’t know how she learned that I was dying; probably the same way she learned about me getting married.

“Where’s your husband?”

I open my eyes. I had almost fallen asleep. Who knows if I would have woken up that time? I turn my head and fix her with a level gaze, but don’t say anything.

“He’s dead, isn’t he?” I nod. “I’m sorry.” At least she has the decency to look contrite.

“Millie, can I please say something?” Really, what’s stopping her now? She’s been talking all afternoon. She puts her teacup and saucer next to mine on the side table, and reaches for my hand. It too stays limp. “I am sorry,” she says. “I’m sorry for leaving you and Mom. I’m sorry for going away. I want you to know that I wish I would have been a greater part of your life. If you hate me, I understand. If you want me to leave, I will. I’m sorry that you have to be the first one to go. I’m sorry I missed Mom. But I really am glad that I made it to your wedding.”

She is rambling. And do I spy tears in her eyes? I take a deep breath. “Mae, please,” I rasp. My voice is soft, so soft, and shaky, weak, but she still breaks off whichever thought she had been in the middle of and listens to me. “I don’t hate you.” Breath. “I cannot hate somebody I don’t know anymore.” Breath. Breath. “But, please, let go of my hand. If you are sorry that I am the first to go, then please don’t hold my hand as I go. I don’t want you.” Breath. Breath. Breath. I can feel my heart fluttering.

Mae doesn’t say anything. Those are tears in her eyes, slipping down her cheeks. She nods in understanding of my words, with a sad little smile. She kisses the back of my hand. Her lips feel as dry and leathery – old – as my skin.

And then she leaves. I definitely know I will never see her again. The first time I’ve had that certainty, watching her leave. And the last.
My back presses against the cool blanket,
Wet with dew.
Above me,
The black sky is illuminated
With flickering stars,
And dark tree branches
Reach
From either side,
Intertwining at the center.
She lies next to me
As beautiful as ever.
A sudden wave of
Fear
And love
Washes over me
As I contemplate reaching out,
Taking her hand.
My arm does not move as
I am paralyzed
By fear and worry and a
Hate with myself
For my hesitation.

But suddenly,
My fingers find hers,
And our hands interlock.
I turn to face her,
And she turns to face me,
And I summon up the courage
To go one step further.
I kiss her,
Gently,
Quickly,
And she returns the favor.
We smile
And laugh
And look back up to the perfect sky,
And I never let go.

Then,
I take a step back,
Back into reality.
My hands
Are in my pockets,
And she is getting up to leave.
She will be in his heart forever
She will be with him
At war
In the trenches
In his pocket
In the locket
In the shape of a heart

The rest of the photo will move on
The rest of the photo will travel
In a pocket,
Forgetting her smile
That was cut away
To fit a locket
In the shape of a heart

Generations later, the locket will be found
Generations later, the photo will be
Discarded
No longer in a pocket
The locket long gone
But her smile will always be remembered
In the shape of a heart
I want to grow small
and settle myself on the rocksoil of his lap
between the soft folds of his arms
so I may rest my head against
his chest of flat white riverstone
worn smooth with time and friction.

I want to set my ear to it
like a child sets her ear to a seashell
and to be lulled by a pulse
of crimson tributaries in secret caverns
that swell with his warm heavy breath.

I want to grow small
to know better this natural wonder that moves
over grass and asphalt and through doorways
to curl himself on a weathered couch
as a bear curls in his winter nest
where I sit watching waiting
to reclaim my treasured earth.

artwork by
Madison Caise
An emotion.
She rises within us
Whispering to us sweet nothings
With a promise
For a chance to
Get even.
For a chance to
Satisfy our need
To conquer
To own
To win
To ruin
Not only them
But eventually ourselves.

Why?

We compare ourselves to our peers:
A rival in sports or academics,
Someone popular,
Or even peers in our majors.
And when we see we are the more attractive,
The more successful,
The more popular,
That is the emotion.
That’s her:
Pride.
Telling us to feel good about this superiority.
We listen and nod as if in conversation with
An old friend,
Always there to help us understand our rightful place.
Why?

Why question her if she makes us feel good
    About ourselves?
But then she gets louder
Exclaiming we should act out on our emotion.
    “No more thoughts,” she commands.
“Let them know who you are and what they are.”
We listen and nod
Because now it makes complete sense!
    Of course we will show them!
Now, this emotion not only affects us
    But others as well.
Person after person,
    Friend after friend,
Victim after victim,
Lives are torn apart by our words and actions
    Until eventually the only victim left
Is us:
    Narcissism.
“One—”
Click.
The edges of the letters on the screen across the room sharpen.
“—or two?”
“Two.”
“Three—”
Click.
The world snaps out of focus.
“—or four?”
“Three.”

He hands me a piece of paper. It has two numbers written on it: my fate.
“Here’s your prescription,” he says.
When I pick up my glasses
two blurry weeks later,
I put them on,
expecting the world to snap into focus
just like it did
when the lenses clicked
back and forth
in that dark room
with the bright screen
twenty feet away
and the black letters
lined up in rows,
pretending to be
in some sort of order.

But when I look
through the curved glass,
my life remains
just
out of focus.
It was a Sunday afternoon in early October when I recognized that the numbness I had felt for months prior was stronger than ever before. The rest of our household was a flurry of movement as we prepared for the upcoming week, but I was useless to them. I couldn’t seem to focus on any of the tasks; cooking meals for the upcoming week, cleaning a bathroom or vacuuming the stairs. I knew no one could identify with these days cloaked with apathy so, excusing myself, I took my jacket and left without a plan in mind. There was a forest preserve just a few blocks down from us. I’ll go there, I decided.

Each building blended in with the next. I had walked this way before, but everything seemed unfamiliar. There wasn’t a soul tending her garden or raking the leaves. The only life I saw came from movement inside living room windows. There was most likely an important football game on. Perhaps the playoffs?

As I neared the entrance of the preserve, which was a thin dirt path partially hidden by overgrown trees, I noticed a small dog peering at me from the porch of the second-to-last house. A Jack Russell Terrier, I guessed. Sweet thing. It turned its head to the side, still surveying me. No barking yet. Curiosity led it to cross the front yard and I stopped as it reached my feet. Remaining calm, it sniffed me for a few moments. I wondered why there wasn’t a leash to keep it from running, but then noticed a doggie door built into the front door. The residents didn’t seem to mind letting the dog roam. Still, I dared not touch it, for fear that its owner was watching from behind translucent curtains. I bent down to read its collar. “Jack” was etched into the nameplate. Clever.

I let Jack explore the ground around me for a little while longer. I wanted to stay and watch him. I longed to hold him; to feel the warmth of a tiny, innocent body in my arms. Instead, I turned to walk into the forest alone.

But I was not alone. Jack was following me. I tried to shoo him back towards his home, but he seemed oblivious to my attempts. After some more pointless efforts to send him away, I gave in. He’ll soon get tired of me, I thought, and I’ll follow him back to the yard to make sure he’s safe and sound. I let him walk beside me for the time being.
At first he ambled along, unconcerned with his surroundings, but as soon as a butterfly crossed his path he began to scamper around the trail in hot pursuit of this little birdlike being. The last thing I wanted was for Jack to end up with a twitching butterfly crunched in between his lips, but I cheered him on anyway. The game ended when the butterfly disappeared somewhere into the trees. With the creature out of sight, Jack quickly lost interest and returned to his leisurely stroll.

I liked his company. There was no need for conversation or explanation, only a silent, shared presence. He didn’t desert me in search for something a little more exciting or fall back to return to his home, even when our walk had lasted for over an hour.

Then I had a distinct thought, one that cut through the fog and debris.

You need to let go.

But I couldn’t do it. I wasn’t ready. Not in front of Jack. I couldn’t ruin this moment of perfect serenity. What if he ran away?

He’s not your dog. If he leaves, it’s nothing you did. Let go.
After I glanced at Jack (he was none the wiser), I turned sharply and left the footpath, making my way through the weeds and crackling leaves. I couldn’t stay on the trail with the chance of someone seeing me. When I didn’t hear Jack following, I felt my stomach drop.

I came across a fallen trunk and set myself down upon it, hanging my head. Even though the apathy remained, for the first time in what seemed like years I felt raw emotion. This depression had settled over me like an opaque sheet that I couldn’t shed. I could hear the constant commotion around me but felt paralyzed and blind. It had left me frustrated and lonely and at this tree’s remains the loss of my sense of freedom and youth had finally caught up to me. I cried.

It was quiet. I left the surroundings undisturbed. I let everything out in a grand exhale: my frustrations, my doubts, my confusion and the ominous unknown.

There. That wasn’t so bad.

I returned to the path, my vision a little clearer, my shoulders a little higher. I braced myself for the loneliness that would return when I saw that Jack was gone, yet it didn’t come back. Jack sat a few meters away, staring down a squirrel. He turned back to me as I exited the brush and he gave a short, cheery yap.

“What are you still doing here?” I laughed. Another bark.

We began the walk back to the preserve entrance and I talked to him. I told him what I could, whatever thoughts were pressing at the time. What does it matter, anyway? I reasoned. Still, I felt a great sense of relief finally giving a voice to the swirling mass of inadequacy, uncertainty and exhaustion.

The return trip was over too quickly. As soon as Jack saw his owner’s house, his pace quickened and he howled excitedly. As if he’d already forgotten the bond we’d formed on our hike, he charged for the doggie door and disappeared behind the swinging flap.

Rather than dwelling on the encounter, I hurried as well. Jack had the right mindset. I could continue straining to stay in the passing moment, but the future was calling. Part of me still wanted to suppress every fleeting thought, but I could sense it was time to open up. Jack had ripped up the bottom of this sheet that daily suffocated me. Now I needed someone to help me tear through the center of it.
Faeries dance amidst the garden—the girl stands alone, the winds dancing around her crown, cracked jewels and rusted gold, some splendid riches galore, all only ever hers.

Hers alone. Hers alone, a Kingdom’s wealth all for the child, so splendid in blue, so pale in fawn tresses, alabaster skin, her eyes looking heavenward—all alone.

Mute and dumb, too strange for society, a fairytale in the garden; no one who will play, speak to the dumb, mute girl-child.

Adults titter as the girl plays pretend: dumb and stupid, mute and strange, a Kingdom’s wealth, sticks and stones, imaginary friends.
“Is there anything else I can get for you?”
The man had been at John’s table a few times that evening, doing his job, trying to serve him, but John failed to recognize him each time.

He looked up, startled, as if he had forgotten where he was and why there would be another human being trying to communicate with him at this very point in time. If one wishes to be forgotten, a restaurant is not the place to go.

“No, thank you,” John replied. “I’m doing quite well…, Brian,” reading his waiter’s nametag. “I’m just waiting for…”

He trailed off, unsure of what to call her. She certainly was not his date, and at this point in the divorce proceedings, he was uncomfortable referring to her as his wife.

John’s eyes wandered around the restaurant—her decision, not his—wondering if she would ever enter. She had set the time and the location; the least she could do was have the decency to arrive in a timely fashion.

A giant pink unicorn paraded through the front doors of the restaurant. There were short human legs underneath it, and a young girl’s arm wrapped around the unicorn’s belly, clinching it awkwardly as she waddled back and forth. The other arm stretched upward, holding the hand of a much taller woman.

She had brought her daughter. Her daughter, who was not his.

“No,” he muttered in between swears. He sat back in his chair at the table for two, a man condemned, and waited for his sentence to be delivered.

“Daddy!” she screamed, running over to John. She jumped on his lap, still holding the unicorn, its horn narrowly missing his eye. She and the unicorn gave him a hug, but he failed to return it. Caprice had clearly not told her yet. Caprice had a habit of breaking her promises—including her wedding vows.

“Hello, Hannah,” he said, his voice devoid of the love and emotion that had once graced his words to her. He knew that it was unfair for him to hate Hannah because of Caprice’s actions, but her very existence bespoke Caprice’s unfaithfulness. Caprice should not have brought her, not tonight.
“I brought the papers,” she said, sliding them, inappropriately wrapped in Christmas wrapping paper, across the table.

“Is this really necessary?” he asked, looking at the red and green reindeer that pranced across a set of papers that reminded him that there would be no more Christmases. He would not take Hannah to see Santa this year, to sit on Santa's lap and tell Santa what she wanted for Christmas while he waited just within earshot so that he could be sure to get her everything she asked for because she was his daughter and he loved her.

She was not his daughter, and he wasn't sure that he could love her anymore.

She, this ball of life that was bouncing up and down on his leg with her oversized unicorn, its horn occasionally nudging his chin when she got too enthusiastic.

“Yes,” Caprice replied. “It is necessary.”

“Very well,” he said, moving Hannah from his lap. He leaned out into the aisle and motioned for Brian to come back to the table.

“Check, please.”
Come walk the valley of dry bones
Lovely frames I used to know
They call to me in haunting groans
Think, my friend, of those below

They once were held as I hold now
Sinews, flesh all veiled by skin
Hands that held and shook in vow
Rest in piles of dust therein

Come forth and tally what each owns
Moldered corpse and lingering throe
They used to speak in vibrant tones
Pearls in worldly oysters glow

They once did dance and I did bow
Reverent, deep I hailed them then
Pine to see—your mind allow
Wakened women, children, men

If sky should rally the unknowns
Rain may fall and water flow
And drench it might these hollow bones
Fragrant scent of earth bestow

And change the boneyard would allow
Water frees the jailed within
Life to souls the rain endow
Mine, as dead, as theirs within
If you asked me to think of life
I'd think of rain.

And tears that fall in tea cups.

I'd imagine a water-colored sky of gray
and an invitation to dance.
There are flowers on the desk, bright in the darkness. The dorm light is dim, but I can see the pink and purple hues that define the hyacinths. I lean in to smell them, and there are no words to describe it.

No—there is one word. Spring.

My sister died in October. She hanged herself in the downstairs bathroom with the tie from her bathrobe. They resuscitated her and stuck her on a vent, but she died four days later anyway. There was a funeral where they did her makeup wrong and she didn’t look like her. Lots of people came; it was sunny outside.

This is what I remember when I try to think about her dying: there were marigolds in pots that you could see from her hospital window; the corn was ripe and leaves were falling; it was cool enough to need a jacket, but warm enough to get away with no hat; the grass was dying.

When I touched her hand before the visitation began, I understood why all the great poets and novelists compared the dead to stone. Her hand was icy cold and hard—not hard as stone, but harder than it should be.

My little sister died in October; my world faded with her.

I work the last week of winter break at the library. Dad has to start work at 7:30, so he drops me off when the sun’s just about to rise. When we head to the car, the sky is still dark and some of the stars cling to the sky.

There is a silence that has everything and nothing to do with the winter. There are no birds this far north willing to abide the cold. If there were, they would probably be dead; temperatures dropped into the negative teens the day before. The snow that is too solid for snowmen crunches beneath my boots; sometimes, it holds my weight and I walk on frozen water.

We’re tired, up before dawn when we want to stay in bed and curl up for warmth. No one goes to bed before ten anymore, and our caffeine hasn’t kicked in.
I wonder if he thinks of the empty bathroom downstairs, the bathroom Mom refuses to enter anymore. He cut her down; does he think of that morning?

I don’t—I’m too tired. Sometimes it seems like a fog has settle in. Occasionally, I wonder what she would say or do. Usually, I remember a little and shut down, like catching a glimpse of a brown-haired nymph rounding the corner in neon running shoes and closing my eyes against the brightness. Sometimes, I forget and wonder how to convince her to come with me to see a movie.

Mostly, I don’t think about her. It’s easy not to when the sun hasn’t risen and snow and cold smother everything.

There are stuffed animals flanking the flowerpots. One stands upright on brown toes, paws sewn together in front, brown eyes watching. The other rests on gray legs that cannot support him, white-and-black-striped tail twining behind. I touch the lemur’s black mouth; he’s soft, his tail softer still. The meerkat is rougher, but more solid, a steadier presence to clutch to my chest.

No one gives college students stuffed animals; we’re too mature for that. Stuffed animals are for tea parties in sunlit rooms and stories to read under covers.

I climb to my chair to plunk them onto my bed. They rest against my pillow and watch as I touch the flowers again and lean in to smell them.

The walk to Kroger is cold. There’s no one silly enough to be out this late, not when it’s this dark and this cold.

Some of the houses have their yard lights on; almost none have lights coming through the windows. That picturesque scene that always pops up in older movies, the New England town in winter where everyone has lights and joy spreading out from within—it’s definitely not there.

Everything is quiet, silent even. If I didn’t know better, I’d say I was the only living thing left. I always think of autumn as death. Crops are packed away and pigs are slaughtered. Blood gushes in the fall. Winter is silence and stillness; it’s waiting to see if Persephone will rise up from Hades to rejoin her mother.

Tonight, winter seems like death.
There’s a book on my desk and a card blocking the title. I drop my bookbag and shake my head.

I told my family I didn’t want a birthday party this year. Cake and my favorite meal, maybe some ice cream on the side, but no present; it doesn’t feel right when there’s no one on my right begging to flip through my latest novel.

I should have known Mom would find some way around that particular edict.

The card has a poem and words of encouragement; the book is the complete works of Dylan Thomas.

How did that go? Do not go gentle into that good night. No, she didn’t go gentle, she flung herself into the void with joyous abandon. She didn’t want to stay in this world.

There are two stuffed animals next to the book, a meerkat and a lemur. And next to the stuffed animals, there are hyacinths.

I don’t realize that I’m crying until I taste salt on my lips.

Outside, the winds buffets silent, immovable snow. It’s cold and dark and it feels like spring will never come. Fog keeps watch in my brain, and more times than not I’m tempted to turn off my alarm, roll over, and never get out of bed again.

But the hyacinths are green like grass and pink like cotton candy and purple like violets. They smell like spring and seem warm against my half-frozen hands.

The birthday before Melanie died, two months before we started to find everything out and eight months before she hanged herself, I went downstairs to my room, dropped my bookbag on the floor, and continued consuming the book I’d started in AP Lit. I only stopped when Melanie hung by my door and motioned to the space heater in the corner, telling me that I couldn’t tell Mom she’d told.

Those hyacinths only came in pink, and winter wasn’t so bad. Melanie was different, not the child I once knew, but not angry or sad or dead.

But this is the winter after, and we’ve already had two snow days. The sun never seems to come out, and the only time I’m warm is when I’m under the covers or taking a shower.

The flowers are watered as I touch their soft petals and cry out the tears I’d bottled up the day I said goodbye.
“To practice any art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow. So do it.”

KURT VONNEGUT, JR